

NAVAL FIGHTERS NUMBER SIXTY - ONE

GRUMMAN F9F PART 3

NAVY PANTHERS

KOREA and BEYOND



BY STEVE GINTER

INTRODUCTION:

Naval Fighters Number Sixty-One is the third part of the Grumman F9F Panther story. It covers the United States Navy usage of the Panther which was defined by its service in Korea. All other Navy carrier-based aircraft which fought in the conflict had much longer operational life pans. The Corsairs, which were now in their second war, stayed in service after Korea almost as long as the F9F. The Skyraider, which entered service in the late forties would still be flying combat missions twenty years later in Vietnam. The Banshee would also outlive the Panther in its all-weather form, remaining in fleet service until 1960. Even the Skyknight, which saw more usage in Korea with the Marines than with the Navy, remained in service well into the Vietnam War. But the Panther lived and died in Korea and is synonymous with the carrier war largely due to the movie, the "Bridges of Toko-Ri", and of course its war record as a close air support aircraft and MiG killer. Heavy combat translated into heavy operational and combat losses. But the Panther was much loved by its pilots for its ability to take heavy damage and still get them out of Indian country safely.

The first book in the series, number fifty-nine, covered the Panther's design, development and testing and was written by Grumman Test Pilot Corwin "Corky" Meyer. The second book, number 60, covered the operational usage by the Marines as well as usage by the the Air Training Command, reserves, Blue Angels and the Argentine Navy.

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DISCLAIMER:

It is quite possible that more Navy units than listed here utilized the Grumman F9F Panther. I purposely left out squadrons, like VF-46 and VF-56, who operated Panthers as interim aircraft until their intended aircraft arrived. In the case of VF-46 and VF-56, the Panthers were flown for little more than a month. In addition, one off users, like the Naval Air Technical Training Unit (NATTU) and the Naval Air Engineering Laboratory (NAEL) are not covered.

FRONT COVER:

VF-111 F9F-2B 127174 with forty mission marks on the fuselage side being positioned on the deck of the USS Valley Forge (CVA-45) in 1952. (Bob Balser via Warren Thompson)

BACK COVER:

Top, VF-52 Panther taxis toward the catapult on the USS Valley Forge (CVA-45) in 1952. (Frank Jones via Warren Thompson) Bottom, VF-821 Panther after a barrier landing aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) in 1951. (Jim Dodge via Warren Thompson)

GRUMMAN F9F PANTHER PART THREE, THE NAVYIN KOREA AND BEYOND



INTRODUCTION: KOREA
NAVAL AIR RESERVE'S WAR

When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, the United States Navy only had 15 carriers of all types in active service. A shortcoming that would soon be rectified as ships were removed from mothballs and rushed into service. The result was an immediate shortage of pilots, crews and maintenance personnel to fill the squadrons needed for the carriers. This shortage could not be fulfilled by heating up the training pipeline and tripling its output as was done in 1950; it could only be done by calling up the reserves.

In June 1950, the Naval Air Reserve rivaled the active duty Naval and Marine air assets by having more than 1,700 aircraft of all types assigned. More importantly, 83% of the active duty airdales at the end of World War Two were reservists and those were by 1950 the backbone of the Naval Reserve. In short, the Naval and Marine reserves had more experience man-for-man operationally and technically than their active duty counterparts. The response from the reserves was swift: before the

Navy had time to implement a recall plan, whole squadrons volunteered. The most notable example was NAS Los Alamitos, CA, based VF-781 Pacemakers, who had 100% of its personnel volunteer. By the second half of 1951 it was estimated that one third of all pilots in combat over Korea, including Air Force pilots, were Naval or Marine reservists. In fact, the USS Boxer's (CV-21) Air

Above, VF-52 F9F-3 on 19 July 1950. The USS Valley Forge (CV-45) was the only American aircraft carrier within close proximity of Japan and Korea when North Korea attacked South Korea on 25 June 1950. It was ordered to North Korean waters on 1 July 1950 and launched its first strike on 3 July. (USN) Below, 100% of Los Alamitos based VF-781 "Pacemakers" personnel volunteered for service in Korea. (USN)



Group 101, except for composite and helicopter detachments, was an all-reserve air group in March 1951.

Many more reserve squadrons would follow VF-781's lead or be activated by Navy planners. Of those, many would eventually fly the Grumman F9F Panther. Those were: VF-653, VF-671, VF-721, VF-742, VF-781, VF-783, VF-821, VF-831, VF-837, VF-916, and VF-921.

THE F9F CARRIER MISSION:
BY RON GERDES VF-111

"I received my wings on 31 January 1950 after basic training in the SNJ at NAS Pensacola, FL, and advanced training in the F4U-4 at NAF Corpus Christi, TX. At age 22, I was assigned to fly F-9s in VF-111 after completing jet transition training in the TO-1 (F-80C) at JTU-1 in February 1950.

While flying with the VF-111 'Sundowners', I was deployed aboard two Essex-class carriers during the Korean War: USS Philippine Sea (CV-47) with Air Group Eleven and the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) with Air Task Group One. The missions we performed on both of these deployments was typical of Panther squadrons during the Korean War.

VF-111 was assigned to perform three basic missions: Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Strike and Photo Escort. The squadron could very well have been designated VFA-111. For the CAP and Photo Escort roles, the Panthers were loaded with 20mm ammo. In addition, strike mission aircraft were loaded with a mix of 5-inch HVAR rockets and/or bombs. External ordnance loads were limited by wind over the deck. The hydraulic catapults were usually charged to their maximum pressure of 3,500 psi. Task force speed and surface winds really dictated the magnitude of our external loads.

CAP flights consisted of a division of four aircraft and usually flew 'fleet air defense' duties at 10,000 feet under radar-guided control from



one of the task force's battleships, carriers or cruisers. I can remember one day when the Task Force had USS Missouri, 4-carriers, 2-cruisers and the usual ring of protective destroyers. I never saw any hostile aircraft during these somewhat boring missions.

Photo Escort flights consisted of the photo plane (F9F-2P and later, F2H-2P) escorted by a single F9F. Since the photo planes were 'armed' only with cameras, the escort was there to warn of hostile ground fire and fight off any enemy aircraft. Depending on the photographic assignment, the photo planes flew anywhere between 10,000 feet down to the deck. The low-level flights were the most exciting. Enemy gunfire that was aimed at the photo plane usually trailed back toward the escort aircraft. We actually lost an F9F-2P that was literally knocked out of the sky at

Above, VF-111 Panther pilot Ron Gerdes in December 1951 off the coast of Korea. (Ron Gerdes)

10,000 feet by heavy caliber anti-aircraft fire.

Strike or interdiction missions were flown in divisions of four aircraft. For major targets, such as large bridges and heavy troop and equipment concentrations, two divisions were employed. The majority of single division strike missions commenced with a climb up to 10,000 feet on the way to the target area. The four aircraft would then descend to about 2,000 to 3,000 feet in trail formation and follow designated roads and/or rail lines, attacking targets of opportunity such as locomotives, trucks, tanks, troops and military buildings, etc.

The most memorable strike missions (after 50 years) were coordinated bridge strikes such as in James A. Michener's 'The Bridges at Toko-Ri.' In this 'all-hands' effort, the Corsairs and Skyraiders carried the bombs to hit the bridges. The F9Fs dove ahead of the 'props' to knock out the anti-aircraft positions with 20mm gunfire and fragmentation bombs.

After a strike, we would climb back up to 10,000 feet on the way back to the ship to conserve our fuel. Tail hooks were then dropped and checked while at altitude. A malfunctioning hook required a diversion and landing ashore at one of several 'friendly' airstrips. Since there were no angled carrier decks at the time, a hook skip or broken hook point meant a barrier engagement, or worse yet, a crash into the pack of parked aircraft ahead of you. Those were the days of the LSO with his ping pong-like paddles.

The F9F was a good carrier aircraft with an approach speed on final of about 114 knots. We were only 'day qualified' but underwent night field carrier landing practice training in the event of a late recovery. I do remember one night catapult launch and I did become a Valley Forge 'Centurion'. I flew 400 hours in the F9F-2 between May 1950 and May 1953."

As Jimmy Doolittle once said, "I could never be so lucky again."



F9F PANTHER KOREAN WAR DEPLOYMENTS									
USS VALLEY FORGE									
CV-45	6-25-50 to 11-23-50	CVG-5	VF-51	S/100	VF-52	S/200			
USS PHILIPPINE SEA									
CV-47	8-1-50 to 3-28-50	CVG-11	VF-111	V/100	VF-112	V/200			
USS LEYTE									
CV-32	10-9-50 to 1-19-51	CVG-3	VF-31	K/100	VF-32	K/200			
USS PRINCETON									
CV-37	12-5-50 to 5-29-51	CVG-19	VF-191	B/100					+
USS PRINCETON									
CV-37	6-2-51 to 8-10-51	CVG-19	VF-23	M/200					+
USS BOXER									
CV-21	3-27-51 to 10-3-51	CVG-101	VF-721	A/100	VF-821	A/200			+
USS BON HOMME RICHARD									
CV-31	5-10-51 to 11-30-51	CVG-102	VF-781	D/100					+
USS ESSEX									
CV-9	8-22-51 to 3-5-52	CVG-5	VF-51	S/100					+
USS ANTIETAM									
CV-36	10-15-51 to 3-22-52	CVG-15	VF-831	H/300	VF-837	H/400			+
USS VALLEY FORGE									
CV-45	12-12-51 to 6-13-52	ATG-1	VF-111	V/100	VF-52	S/200			+
USS PHILIPPINE SEA									
CV-47	1-30-52 to 7-8-52	CVG-11	VF-112	V/200	VF-113	V/300			+
USS BOXER									
CV-21	3-10-52 to 9-6-52	CVG-2	VF-24	M/400					+
USS PRINCETON									
CV-37	4-4-52 to 10-8-52	CVG-19	VF-191	B/100					+
USS BON HOMME RICHARD									
CV-31	6-21-52 to 12-18-52	CVG-7	VF-71	L/100	VF-72	L/200			+
USS ESSEX									
CV-9	7-18-52 to 1-13-53	ATG-2	VF-23	M/100	VF-821	A/200			+
USS KEARSARGE									
CV-33	9-14-52 to 4-22-53	CVG-101	VF-721	A/100					
USS ORISKANY									
CV-34	2-10-52 to 5-2-53	CVG-102	VF-781	D/100	VF-783	D/200			
USS VALLEY FORGE									
CV-45	12-30-52 to 6-10-53	CVG-5	VF-51	S/100	VF-53	S/300			+
USS PHILIPPINE SEA									
CV-47	1-29-53 to 7-27-53	CVG-9	VF-91	N/100	VF-93	N/300			+
USS PRINCETON									
CV-37	3-13-53 to 7-27-53	CVG-15	VF-153	H/300	VF-154	H/400			+
USS BOXER									
CV-21	5-12-53 to 7-27-53	ATG-1	VF-52	S/200	VF-111	V/100	VF-151	H/300	
+ = VC-61 Photo-Recon F9F-2P and F9F-5P Detachments									

NAVAL AIR TEST CENTER (NATC), PATUXENT RIVER, MARYLAND

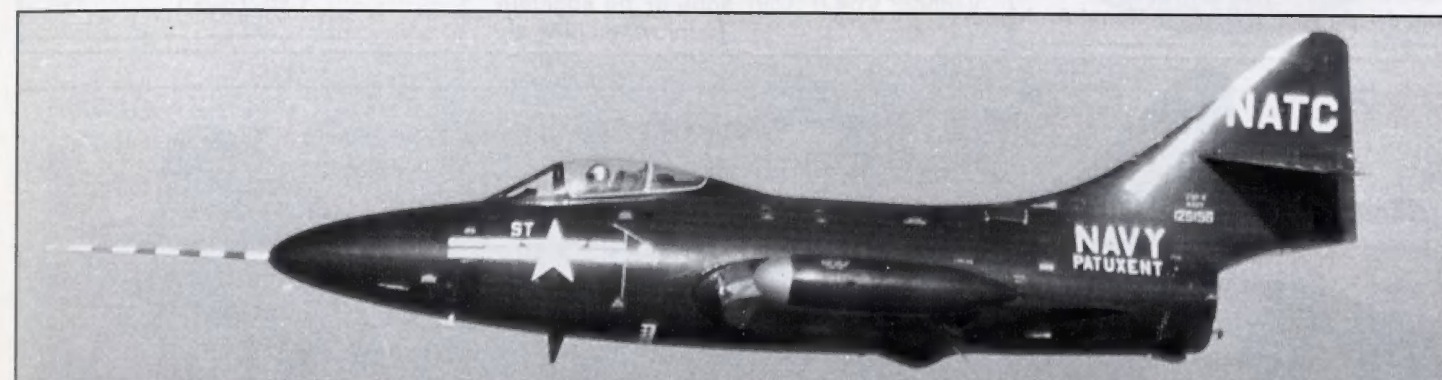
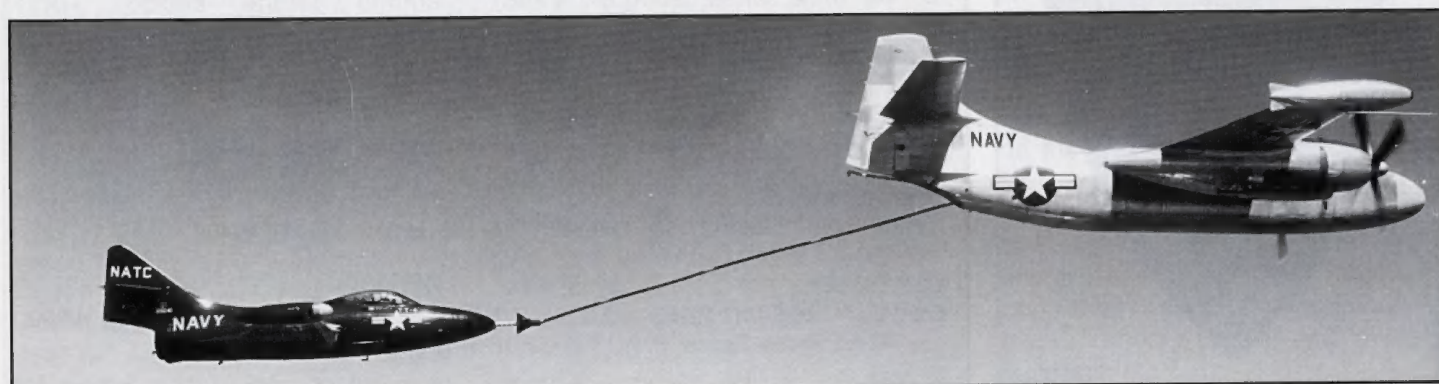


The primary mission of the Naval Air Test Center (NATC) is to determine an aircraft's suitability for usage in the fleet. During the late '40s and early '50s, NATC project pilots and engineers were divided among four test divisions. Flight Test (FT) concentrated on aircraft and engine performance, stability and control and carrier suitability. Service Test (ST) evaluated operational and tactical suitability, emphasizing maintenance. Electronic Test (ET) was responsible for all the avionics equipment. Armament Test (AT) evaluated the aircraft as a weapons platform.

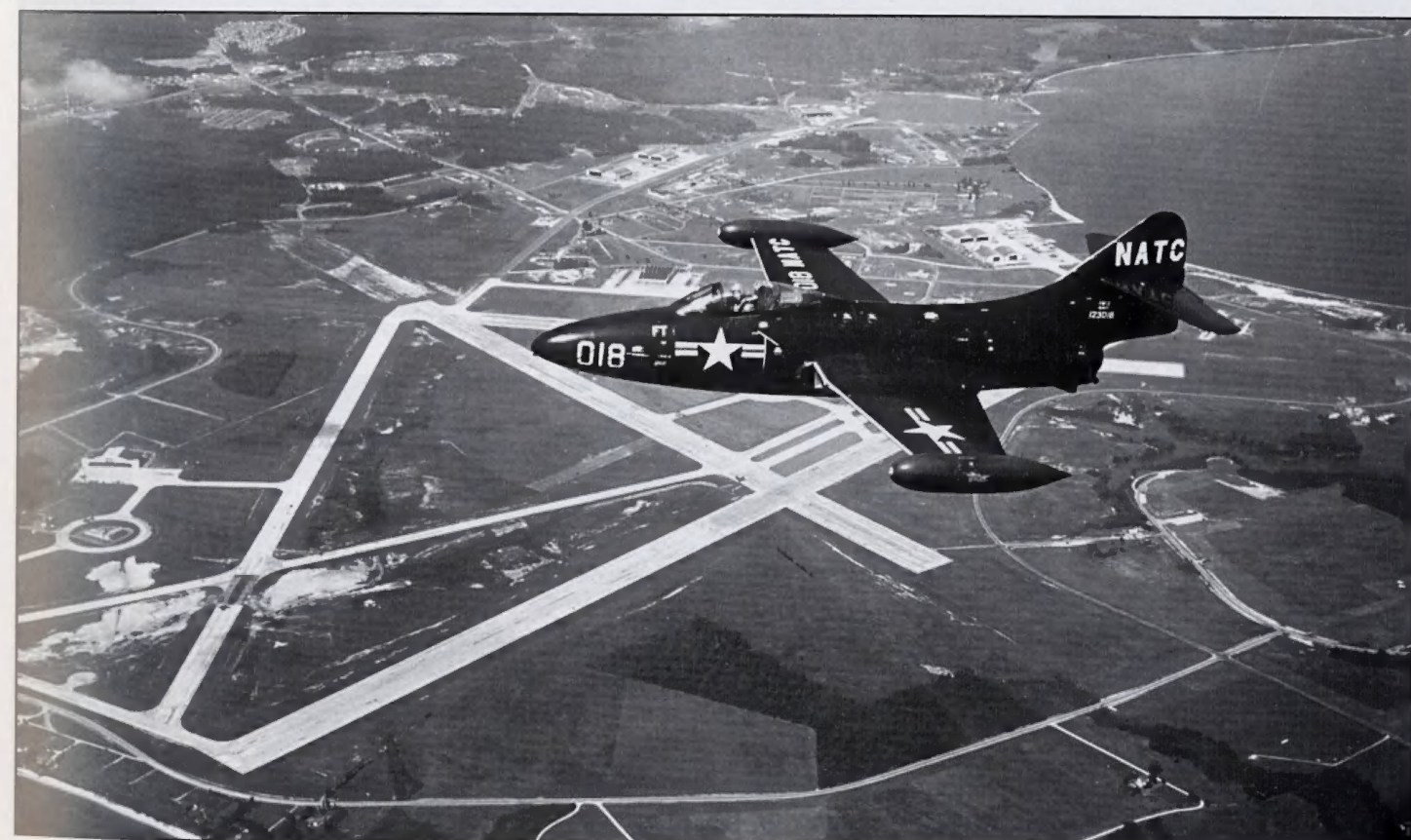
Additionally, the NATC supplied an evaluation team to the contractor's plant for a Preliminary Evaluation (NPE), a formal series of tests with the prototype models prior to the aircraft's arrival at NATC, and conducted fleet suitability evaluations using the test center's aircraft. Finally, the Service Test Division (ST) aircraft and personnel were later involved in the Fleet Introductory Program (FIP), which trained the first squadron, its pilots, and ground crews scheduled to operate the new aircraft.



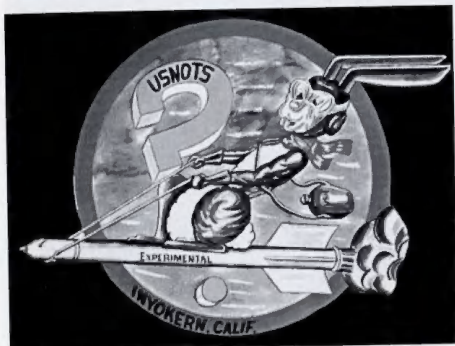
Above, two views of NATC F9F-2 122569 on 29 July 1949. NATC was normally found on the vertical tail but was missing here. Note location of wing codes. (USN) Below, NATC F9F-5 125240 with nose-mounted refueling probe conducting a test hookup with an all-metal finished North American XAJ-1 Savage in 1952. (USN)



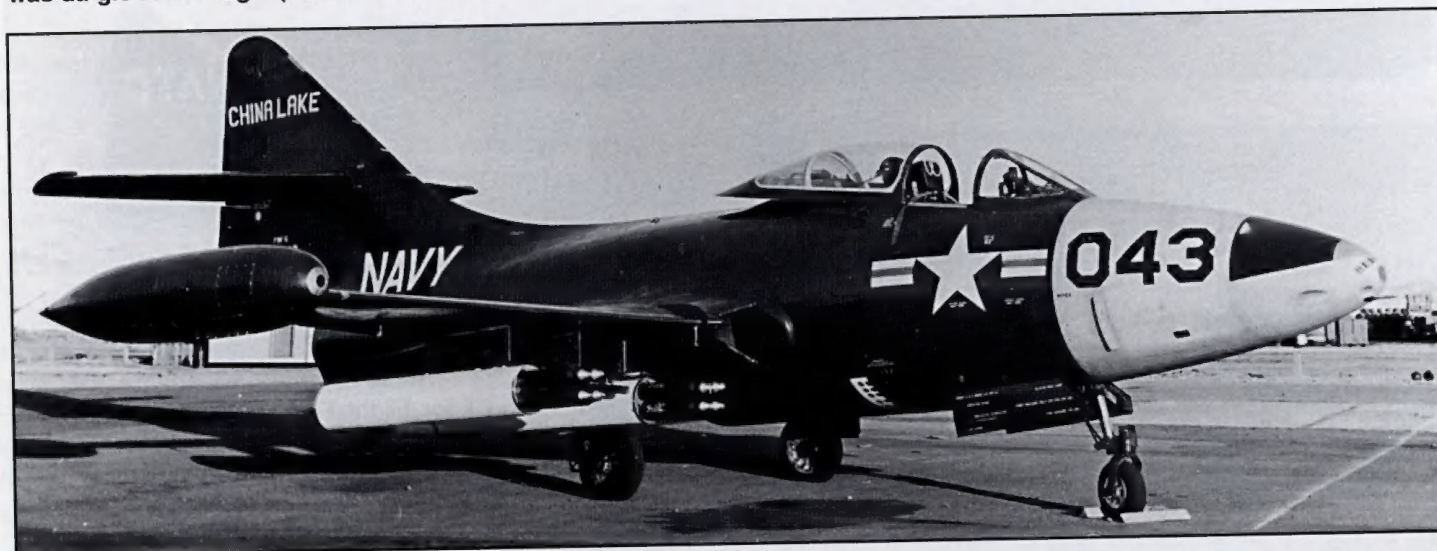
At top, NATC F9F-4 125156 during carrier trials aboard CVA-20 on 20 April 1954. FT for Flight Test is located between the national insignia and 156. (USN via SDAM) Above, same aircraft, date unknown, with ST for Service Test painted just below the windscreen. (Grumman) Below, NATC F9F-2 123018 over Patuxent River, MD, in 1947. Aircraft was assigned to Flight Test (FT). (National Archives)



NAVAL ORDNANCE TEST STATION (NOTS), CHINA LAKE, CA



Above and below, NOTS China Lake F9F-5 assigned to the Zuni rocket development program in November 1955. Nose cone was da-glo red/orange. (National Archives)

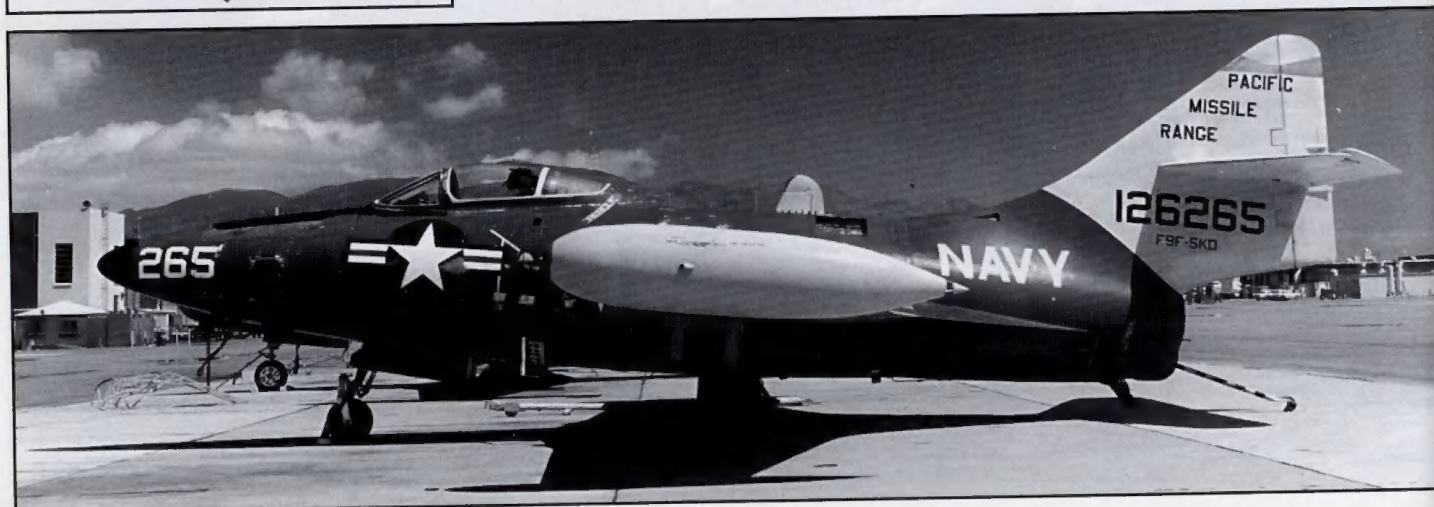


PACIFIC MISSILE RANGE, NAS POINT MUGU, CA

The Panther jet was used at the Pacific Missile Range, NAS Point Mugu, CA, primarily as a target drone for the new air-to-air missile target systems being tested and developed at Point Mugu. The hunting aircraft could be from the range itself or from VX-4, which was also based at NAS

Point Mugu.

Below, F9F-5KD (first F9F-5P) 126265 at NAS Point Mugu, CA, on 22 April 1961. Aircraft was engine grey with yellow tail and wings and odd-shaped orange fin tip stripe. (William Swisher)



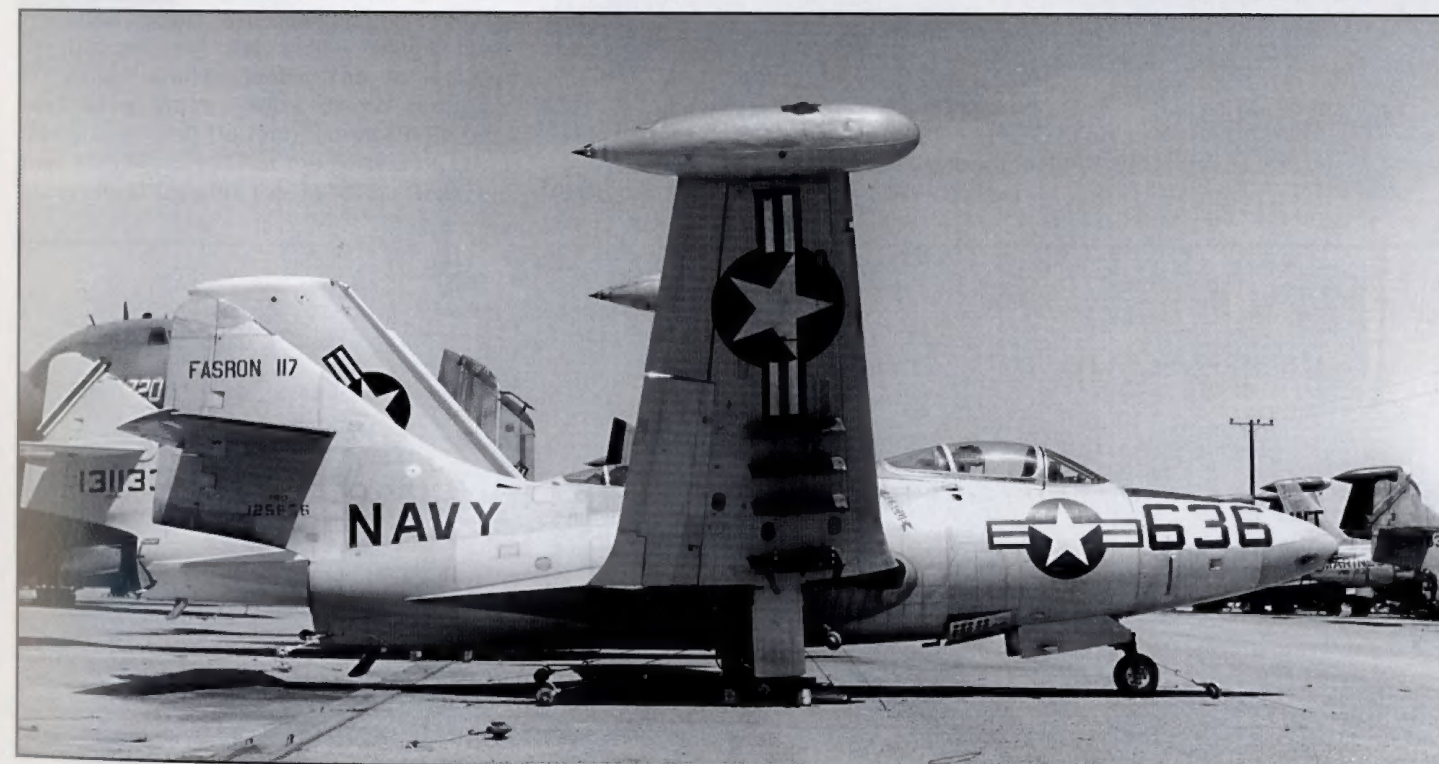
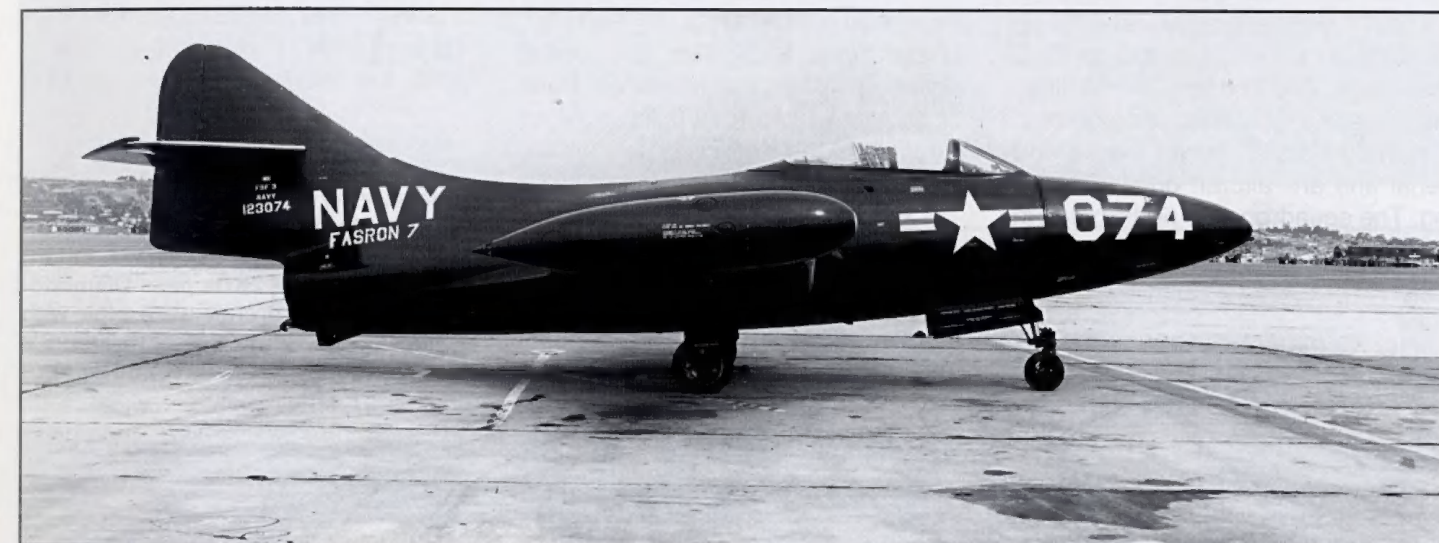
FLEET AIRCRAFT SERVICE SQUADRONS (FASRONS)



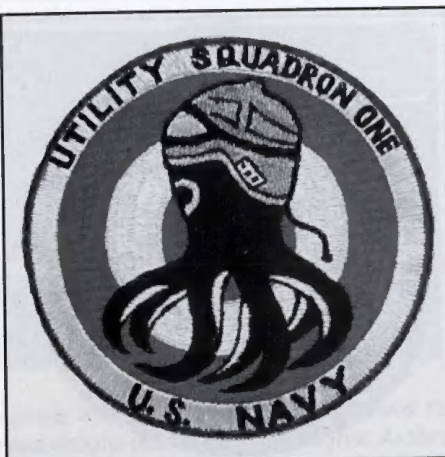
FASRON 7

From 1 January 1947 through 1960, shore based FASRONS were responsible for the majority of maintenance on Navy aircraft. After 1960, the parent squadron was responsible for all maintenance short of overhaul and the FASRONS were disestablished. At least 12 FASRONS had Panthers assigned.

Below, FASRON 7 F9F-3 123074. (Peter M. Bowers collection) Bottom, natural metal FASRON 117 F9F-5 125636 at NAS Alameda on 16 June 1957. (Larry Smalley via William Swisher)

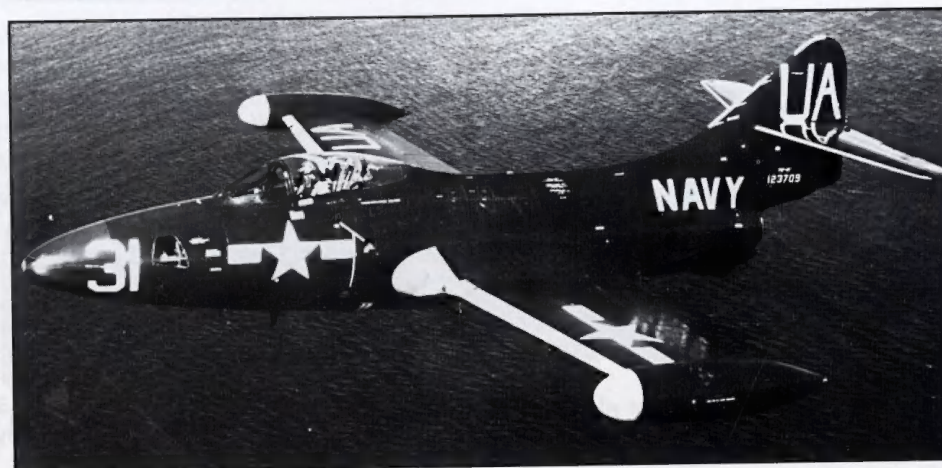


UTILITY SQUADRON ONE, VU-1 "UNIQUE ANTIQUERS"



VU-1 was originally established as VJ-1 on 5 October 1925 at NAS San Diego, CA. The squadron fulfilled the missions of aerial photography, simulated attacks, target towing and aerial and anti-aircraft gunnery training. The squadron also participated in the Alaskan Aerial Surveys of 1926 and 1934.

In September 1939, a VJ-1 detachment moved to Ford Island,



Pearl Harbor, T.H. By June 1940 Ford Island was home for the entire squadron. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, VJ-1 provided utility services throughout the Pacific.

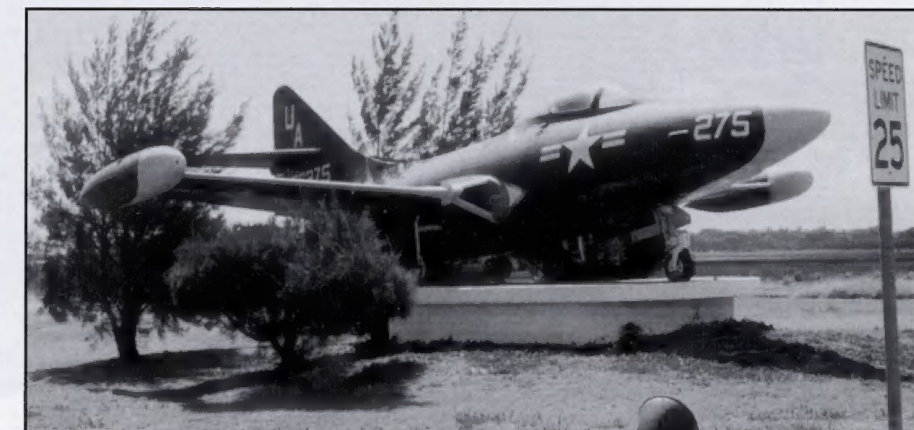
On 31 July 1944, the squadron moved to NAS Moffett Field, CA, where it was redesignated Utility Squadron One (VU-1) on 15 November 1946. VU-1 was disestablished on 30 April 1949.

VU-1 was re-established at NAS Barbers Point, T. H., on 20 July 1951, from the VU-7 detachment already

Above, VU-1 F9F-2P 123709 piloted by LT B. L. Zentz off of Waikiki Beach on 12 November 1953. (USN via Elliott) Below, VU-1 F9F-2KDs pass Diamondhead in 1954. Aircraft were blue with yellow wings and vertical tail and a orange rudder. (USN via Fred Roos)

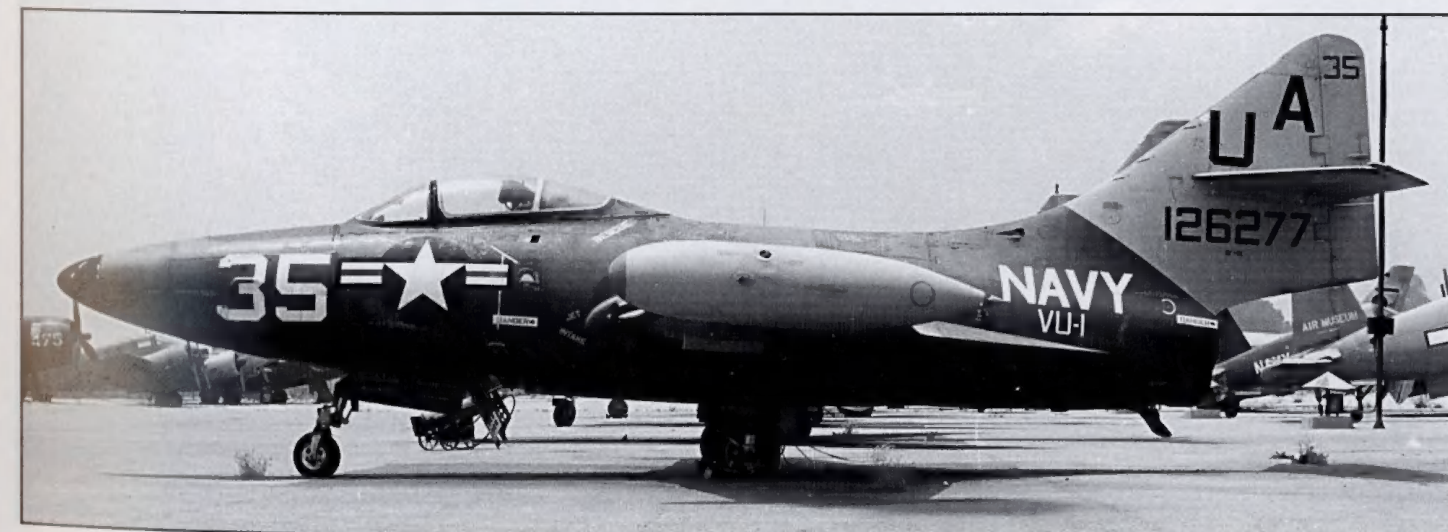


stationed there. The squadron was originally equipped with five JD-1s (A-26s), five TBM-3Us, and one SNB-2P. The F9F Panther arrived in 1953 and was utilized through 1957. The squadron provided fleet utility services until redesignated Fleet Composite Squadron One (VC-1) on 1 July 1965.



Above, VU-1 F9F-5KD 126275 in flight from NAF China Lake, CA. Fuselage was engine grey (blue/grey) with yellow wings, horizontal tail and tip tanks. The vertical tail and wing stripes were da-glo red. (via Gerry Markgraf) Bottom, retired DF-9E (former F9F-5P) 126277 at the Planes of Fame Museum at Ontario, CA, in 1968. (Ginter)

Above, retired VU-1 F9F-5KD (F9F-5P) 126275 on static display at NAS Barbers Point, HI, in 1982. The last two operational F9F-5KDs in the fleet were retired from VU-1 on 2 December 1964. (Ginter)



GUIDED MISSILE GROUP ONE, GMGRU-1

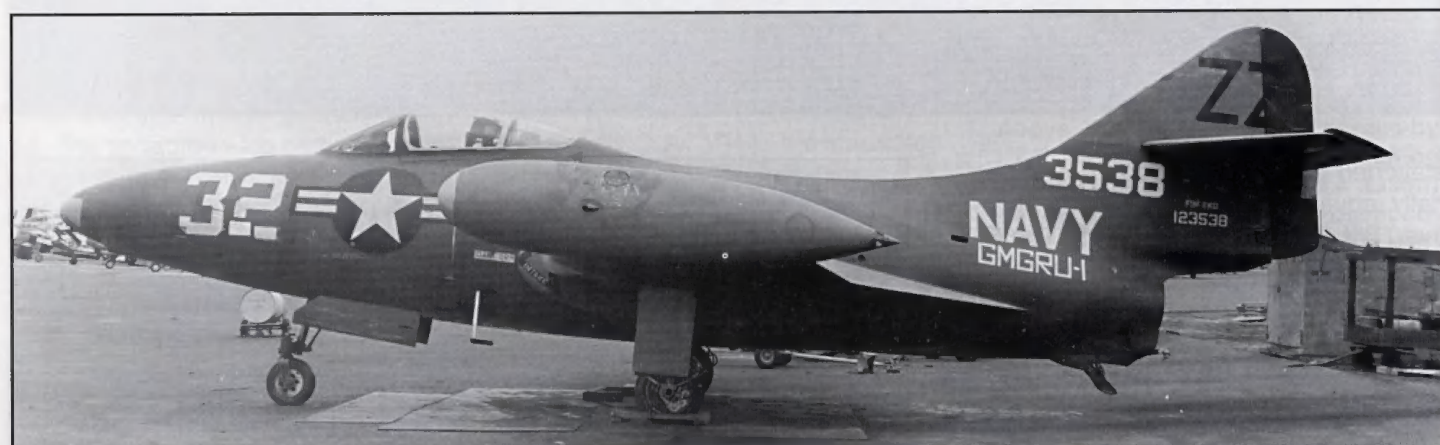


GMGRU-1 was established on 16 September 1955 when VU-3 RAM DET and GMU-52 were combined. The unit was originally stationed at NAS North Island, CA, but most of its early work was conducted in the Mojave Desert and later San Nicolas Island. The main mission of the unit was the control and delivery of Regulus ship and submarine launched missiles. The F9F-2KD and F9F-5KD drones were used primarily to train drone control pilots which flew TV-2Ds, F9F-6Ds and FJ-3Ds. The Panthers were not true drones as they required safety pilots for take-off and landing. The Panthers were also

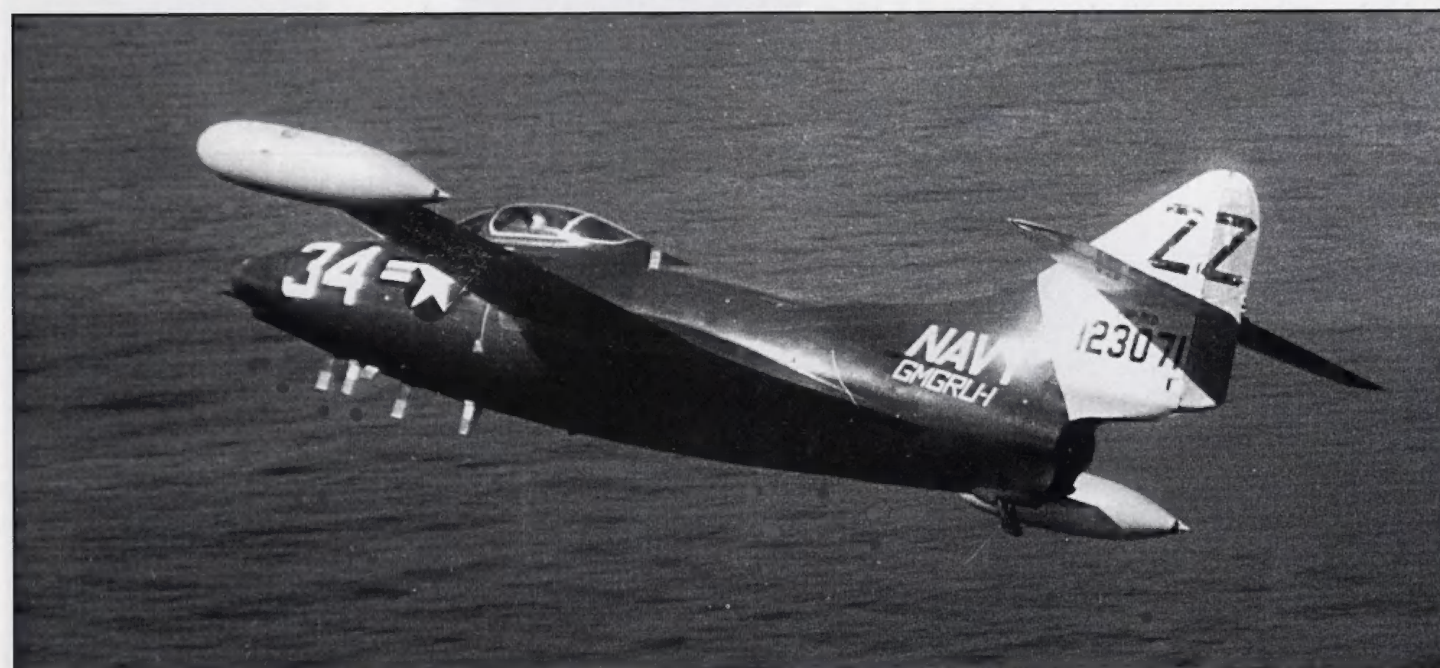
used heavily for cruiser and submarine control training.

The unit, along with Submarine Division 51 from Port Hueneme, CA, moved to Hawaii on 20 July 1956. The unit was based at Barbers Point, T. H., but also operated from ALF Bonham at Barking Sands, Kuai. The Regulus test launches and recoveries were also conducted from ALF Bonham.

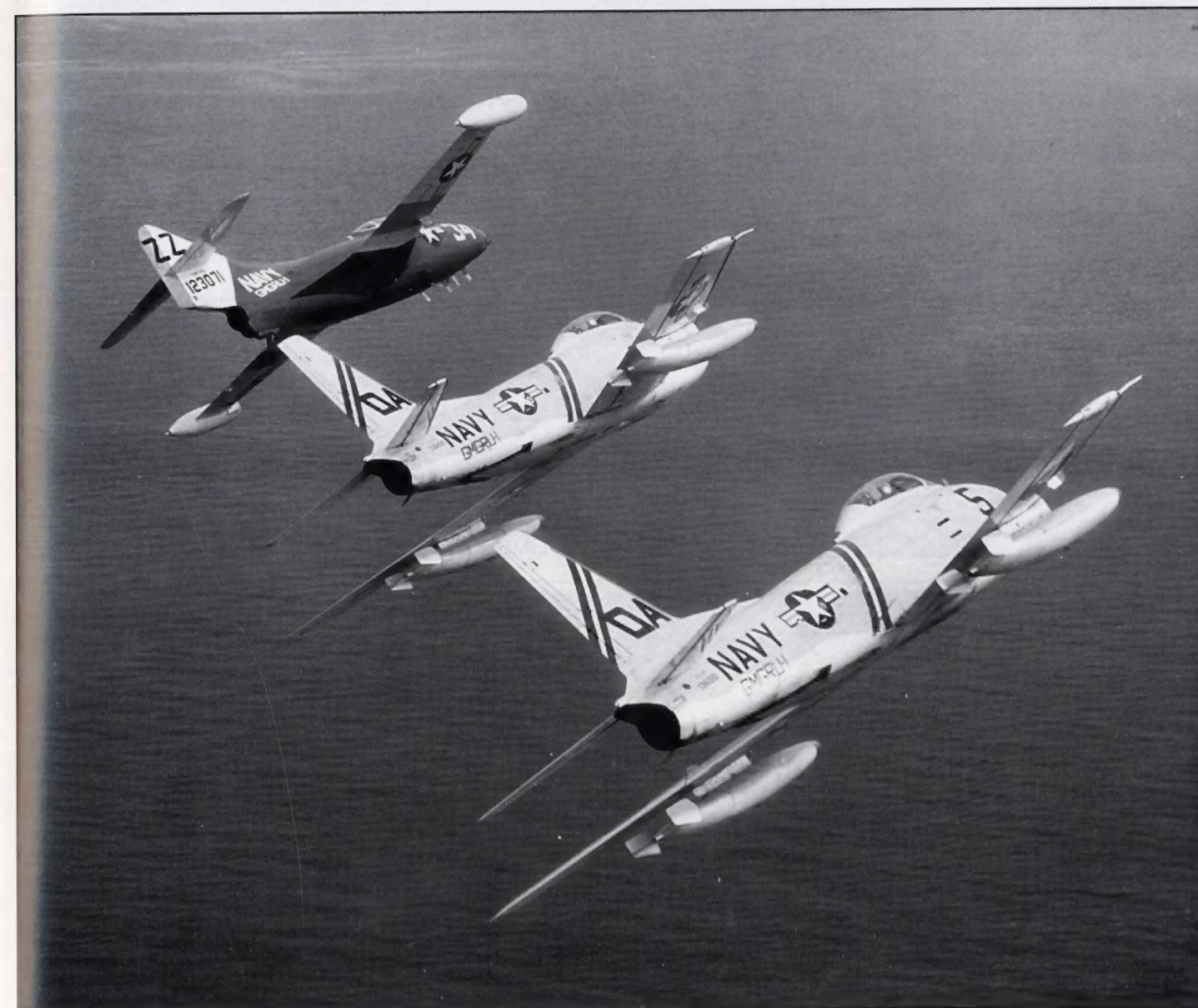
In June 1956, a permanent DET CONUS was established at NAS Point Mugu, CA, with two Panthers.



Above, GMGRU-1 F9F-2KD 123538 at NAS North Island, CA, on 12 September 1959. (William Swisher) Below, GMGRU-1 F9F-2KD on 15 May 1957 off the coast of Oahu, T.H. Aircraft was engine grey with yellow wings, tip tanks, horizontal tail and vertical fin. The rudder and wing stripe was orange. (Bob Lawson via the SDAM)



Above, GMGRU-1 F9F-2KD 123616 on 29 June 1958 at NAS Point Mugu, CA, with "Conus Det" written on the nose. (National Archives via Stan Piet) Below, two GMGRU-1 FJ-3D Furys escort a GMGRU-1 F9F-2KD off the coast of Oahu, T. H., on 13 May 1957. (Bob Lawson)





Above, F9F-2KD 123461 at NAS North Island, CA, in 1964. Note width and position of the orange wing stripe with the ZZ tail code repeated on it. (Gene Sommerich via Peter M. Bowers)

GUIDED MISSILE GROUP TWO, GMGRU-2



On 23 September 1955, VU-4 RAM DET and GMU-53 combined to form GMGRU-2 at Chincoteague, VA. Panthers were utilized to conduct the same missions as with GMGRU-1 on the West Coast.

GMGRU-2 was redesignated Guided Missile Service Squadron Two (GMSRON-2) on 1 July 1958. Since carrier RAM was no longer utilized, missile launching capability was handed over to GMU-51. GMSRON-2

continued to provide missile recovery and drone services.

Below, GMGRU-2 F9F-5KD 126274 at NAF Litchfield Park, AZ, on 21 March 1960. Many of the Panthers converted to drones and drone director aircraft were originally F9F-5Ps. Like VU-1 and GMGRU-1 aircraft, it has an engine grey fuselage with yellow wings, tip tanks, horizontal tail and vertical tail. The rudder and wing stripe was orange. (William Swisher)



AIR DEVELOPMENT SQUADRON THREE, VX-3



VX-3 was formed on 20 November 1948, by merging two squadrons of CVLG-1, VF-1L and VA-1L. The squadron's main mission was threefold: to evaluate new and already existing naval aircraft, airborne equipment and methods; recommend methods for the most effective tactical employment of aircraft and equipment; and to recommend training procedures and countermeasures for these aircraft and methods. Based at NAS Atlantic City, N. J., VX-3 flew nearly every new model of car-

rier-based aircraft in the fleet from 1948 until disestablished on 1 March 1960.

A VX-3 pilot died on 25 May 1950, when F9F-2 123478 crashed during landing at Atlantic City.

Below, VX-3 F9F-5 in flight over NAS Atlantic City, N. J., in April 1953. (USN) Bottom, VX-3 F9F-5P 126279 on loan to the Naval Air Test Center's Tactical Test Division (TT) with rarely seen wing-mounted fuel tanks. (Grumman)



ALL - WEATHER FIGHTER SQUADRON FOUR, VF(AW)-4 "NIGHTCAPPERS"



An early attempt at protecting the anti-submarine carriers and providing them with a limited attack capability took place aboard the USS Antietam (CVS-36) in the fall of 1956. Six Grumman F9F-5 Panthers from VF(AW)-4 Detachment Fifty were assigned. Known as "O'Malley's Chickens", they provided precision bombing and rocket attacks during task group flight demonstrations throughout the Mediterranean Sea.



UTILITY SQUADRON FIVE, VU-5 "WORKHORSE OF THE FLEET"

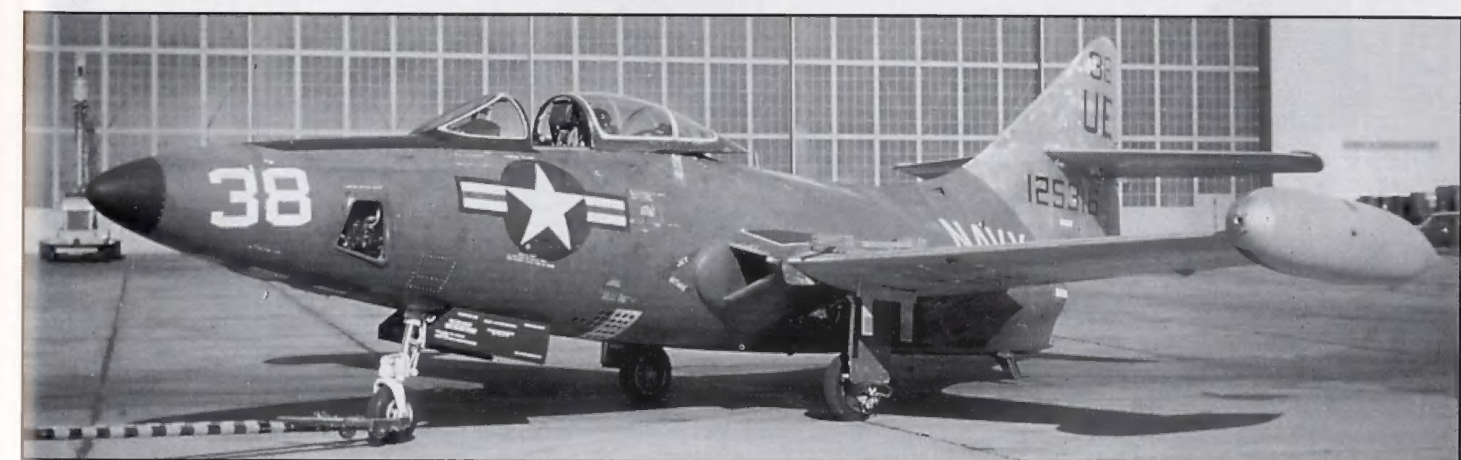


VU-5 was established on 16 August 1950 in order to provide utility services to the fleet in and around the islands of Japan. The unit's primary mission was to provide targets for both the aerial and surface components of the fleet. They also provided photo services, adversary services and airborne control of surface launched missiles. VU-5 became VC-5 on 1 July 1965.

Below, VU-5 F9F-5KD 125316 and FJ-3D2 135997 taxi out for a mission on 3 November 1961 from NAS Atsugi. (T. Matsuzaki) Bottom, VU-5 DF-9E 125316 at NAS Alameda, CA, in June 1962. (Thomas Chenoweth)



Above, F9F-5KD (DF-9E) 125316 and below, 126266 landing at NAS Atsugi on 2 August 1962. Both aircraft were originally F9F-5Ps (T. Matsuzaki)



UTILITY SQUADRON SEVEN, VU-7 UTRON SEVEN

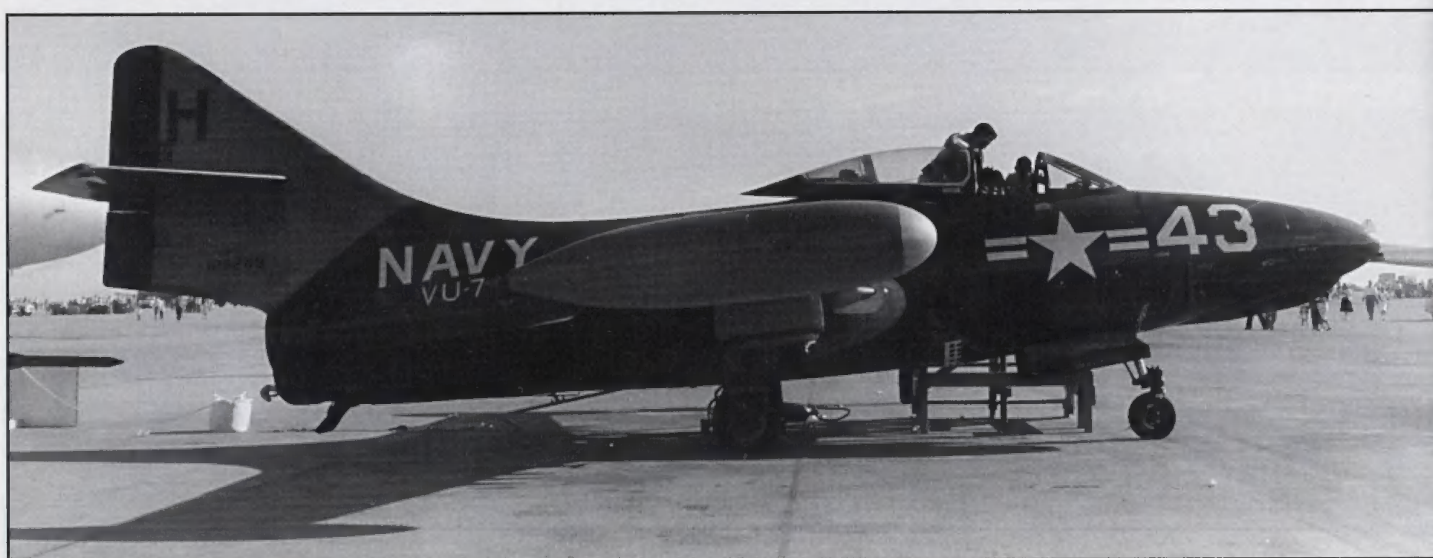


Above, VU-7 F9F-5 125278 in 1955. (Ed Maloney via Swisher) Below, VU-7 F9F-5 126101. (Peter Bowers collection) Bottom, VU-7 F9F-5 125249 at NAS Miramar on 30 October 1955. (William Swisher) All three aircraft had blue fuselages with yellow wings and tail and orange rudder and wing stripes.

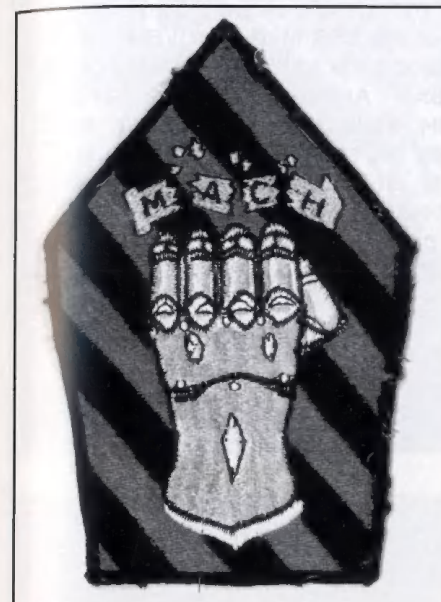
Utility Squadron Seven (VU-7) was established on 4 December 1942 at NAS Alameda, CA, with the mission of providing utility aircraft services to units of the Pacific Fleet.

These services included the towing of aerial targets and launching drone targets for surface-to-air and air-to-air gunnery and missile firing. VU-7 relocated to NAS Miramar, CA, prior to

being redesignated Fleet Composite Squadron Seven (VC-7) on 1 July 1965.



FIGHTER SQUADRON TWENTY - ONE, VF-21 "MACH BUSTERS"



VF-21 was established as VF-74A on 1 May 1945, then redesignated VF-74 on 1 August 1945. The squadron was redesignated once again, and became VF-1B on 15 November 1946. Finally, on 1 September 1948, the squadron was designated VF-21.

With F9F-2s, VF-21 deployed aboard the USS Midway (CVB-41) for a Mediterranean cruise from 9 January through 8 October 1952. On 28 February the squadron took part in Operation Grand Slam, a joint English, French, Italian and American exercise. The Midway returned to Norfolk on 5 May for some scheduled maintenance and hosted BuAer test aircraft from Pax River during this

period. Two short sojourns were conducted to Halifax, Nova Scotia, prior to departing Norfolk on 26 August for NATO exercises in the North Sea. On 12 September, the Midway and Carrier Air Group Six joined the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt (CVB-42), USS Wasp (CV-18), and the USS Wisconsin (BB-64) for Operation Main Brace. The operation ended on 24 September and the ship made a stop at Cherbourg, France, and Plymouth, England, before returning to Norfolk.

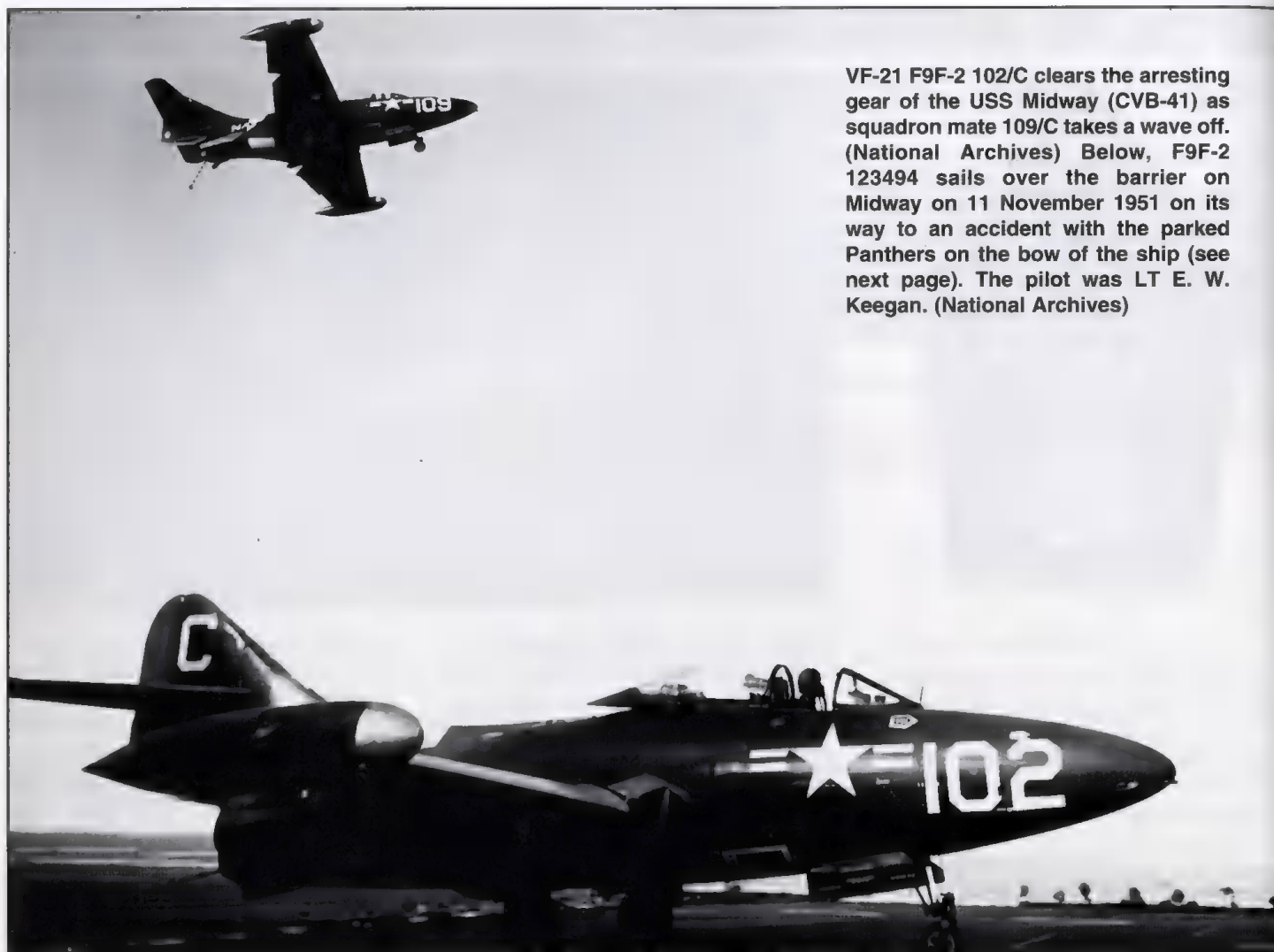
A second Panther cruise, with F9F-5s aboard the Midway, took place from 1 December 1952 through 19 May 1953. The Midway operated as the flagship for Carrier Division

Four and participated in NATO exercise Operation Rendezvous before returning to Norfolk.

After returning to NAS Oceana, VF-21 transitioned to the Grumman F9F-7 Cougar in July 1953. The squadron transitioned to the Grumman F11F-1 Tiger in June 1957. As the Mach Busters, they flew the Tigers into 1960. The squadron became the F11F and A4D RAG and was redesignated VA-43 on 1 July 1959.

Above VF-21 Panther on the hangar deck of Midway in 1952. (USN) Below, silhouetted VF-21 F9F-2 on Midway in 1952. (USN)

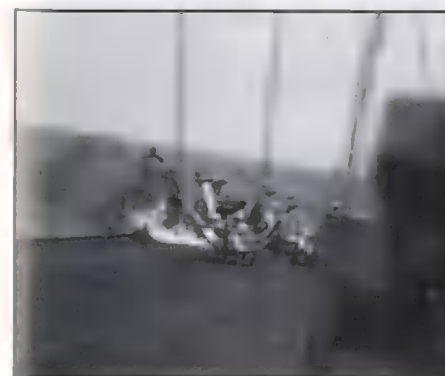




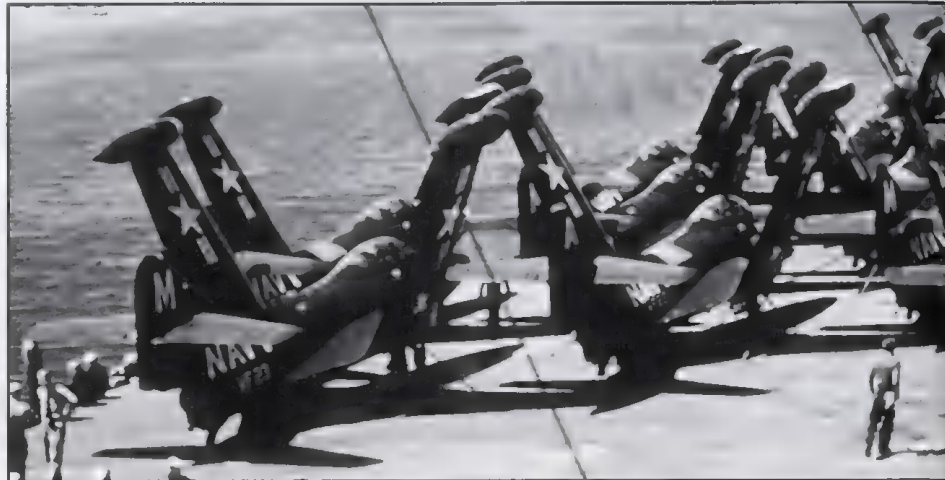
VF-21 F9F-2 102/C clears the arresting gear of the USS Midway (CVB-41) as squadron mate 109/C takes a wave off. (National Archives) Below, F9F-2 123494 sails over the barrier on Midway on 11 November 1951 on its way to an accident with the parked Panthers on the bow of the ship (see next page). The pilot was LT E. W. Keegan. (National Archives)



Above, VF-21 F9F-2 123494 touches down on the USS Midway (CVB-41) in 11 November 1951 and misses the wires. Below, aircraft continues into the barrier, breaks through it and continues up the deck toward the parked aircraft. Bottom right, the aircraft enters the pack of parked Panthers. Bottom left, explosion after impact and when the smoke cleared three aircraft had ended up in the sea. Wing and fuselage stripes were white. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON TWENTY - THREE, VF-23 "FLASHERS"



Above, VF-23 F9F-2's "M" tail code and VF-821 "A" tail code parked on the forward deck of the USS Essex (CV-9) in 1952. (via Don Priest) Below, VF-23 F9F-2 123539 touches down on the Essex in 1952. (USN)

VF-23 was established on 6 August 1948 at NAS Oceana flying the F4U-5 Corsair. The F9F-2 was received on 4 January 1951 and VF-23 embarked on the USS Princeton (CV-37) from 30 May through 29 August 1951 to Korea. The squadron lost a pilot and F9F 123618 on 5 June 1951 as a result of a ramp strike.

The squadron returned to Korea aboard the USS Essex (CV-9) for

their second Panther war cruise from 18 July 1952 through 16 January 1953. On 17 October, a VF-23 pilot crashlanded his flak-riddled Panther aboard Essex after a mission over Korea. Another aircraft was lost on a strafing run on 22 November. During the squadron's Essex deployment, they flew 3,043 combat hours with each pilot averaging 188 flight hours and 72 combat sorties.

In March 1953, the squadron transitioned to the F2H-3 Demon and on 11 December 1956 the F4D-1 Skyray started replacing the squadron's F2H-3s. In November 1958 the Skyrajs were traded in for F3H-2 Demons and on 23 February 1959 VF-23 was redesignated VF-151. In 1964 the F-4B Phantom was received. VF-151 received F/A-18 Hornets and was redesignated VFA-151 on 1 June 1986.



FIGHTER SQUADRON TWENTY - FOUR, VF-24 "CORSAIRS"



Originally established as VB-74 on 1 May 1945, with Curtiss Helldivers. They were redesignated VA-1B on 15 November 1946 and equipped with AD-1 Skyraiders in July 1947 and became VA-24 on 1 September 1948. F4U-4 Corsairs were received in February 1949 and the squadron's designation was changed once again on 1 December 1949, this time to VF-24. The squadron was transferred to NAS Alameda, CA, from NAAS Oceana, VA, in June 1950 in preparation for the Korean conflict.

VF-24 returned from a Korean combat cruise aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) on 9 June 1951 and moved to NALF Santa Rosa, CA, where they transitioned to the Grumman F9F-2 Panther. The squadron's second war deployment aboard Boxer took place from 8 February through 26 September 1952. On 29 August, VF-24 Panthers participated in a joint Navy, Marine, Air Force, British, and Australian 1,000-plus aircraft raid on Pyongyang.

After returning from their second combat tour, VF-24 acquired the F9F-6 Cougar. The FJ-3/3M Fury replaced the Cougars in late 1955 and VF-24 received their first F3H-2M Demons in the summer of 1957 and the F11F-1 Tiger on 23 December 1958. On 9

March 1959, VF-24 was redesignated VF-211. VF-211 acquired the F8U-1 Crusader in December 1959 and flew various versions until December 1975 when the F-14A Tomcat took over.

Above, VF-24 F9F-2 aboard Boxer in 1952. Fin tip and nose markings were yellow. (USN via Kaston) Below, VF-24 F9F-2 with a 250 pound bomb under each wing takes off from the Boxer in May 1952. (Art Schoeni)





Above, the Boxer's Commanding Officer gives the command to launch a VF-24 Panther loaded with 250 pound bombs on 27 April 1952 off the coast of Korea. This was the Boxer's 12,000th launch. (National Archives) Below, VF-24 Panther off the coast of Korea in 1952. (USN)



Above, four VF-24 F9F-2 Panthers off the coast of Korea in 1952. (USN) Below, VF-24 F9F-2 returns from a mission over Korea with tailhook down in preparation for landing aboard the USS Boxer in 1952. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON THIRTY - ONE, VF-31 "TOMCATTERS"



Fighter Squadron Thirty-One started out life as VF-1B on 1 July 1935 with F4B-4s. Redesignated VF-6 on 1 July 1937, the squadron flew F3Fs and later F4Fs. During World War Two, on 15 July 1943 VF-6 became VF-3 and transitioned to F6F Hellcats. On 15 November 1946, the squadron became VF-3A and transitioned to the F8F-1 Bearcat. VF-3A became VF-31 on 7 August 1948 and transitioned to the F9F-2 in December 1949.

VF-31 was the first East Coast squadron selected to receive the Grumman F9F-2. The first Panther arrived on 27 December 1948, along with four experienced pilots from VF-51. The pilots: LTs Donald C. Davis, Paul D. Davison, Vincent Kelly and James Ritchie eased the squadron's transition. FCLP was conducted in the spring of 1950 and carrier qualifications commenced on 3 April aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47). The squadron completed 286 landings and completed the CarQuals on 6 April.

In May 1950, 16 Panthers, 19 pilots, and 104 other squadron personnel left NAS Quonset Point and joined Air Group 3 aboard the USS Leyte (CV-32) for a Sixth Fleet deployment. During the deployment, the Air Group took part in amphibious exercises on the island of Crete. Because of commencement of the Korean War, the cruise was cut short and the Leyte returned to port in August and departed for Korea on 5



September.

The Leyte arrived on station on 9 October and VF-31 was selected to launch Air Group Three's first operation on 10 October. The squadron's skipper led the first launch CAP flight. This was followed by two four-plane interdiction flights to Chongjin, a port and rail center 250 miles north of Wonsan. On the 11th, the same operations were repeated and VF-31 destroyed a locomotive, two rail cars and a pair of trucks. On 19 October, Davis' four-plane flight caught a North Korean freight train between two mountain tunnels. After destroying a locomotive and several boxcars, Davis found a second train and when the dust settled from this attack, a total of three locomotives and eight boxcars had been destroyed in both attacks. At the start of the second attack of the day, Davis went into the sea after a cold cat shot. Thankfully, he was rescued without injury.

On the morning of 12 November Air Group Three launched a bridge busting flight to the Sinuiju's bridges on the Yalu river. VF-31 was tasked with TarCap (target combat air patrol) and were in for an exciting mission. The action started when four MiG-15s made a half-hearted pass at Kelley's division about 20 miles south of the bridges at Angels 20. Following was Paul Davidson's division, who spotted a second MiG formation and warned Kelly. One of Davidson's pilots, ENS Joe Stell, spotted 10 more MiGs to the north and then reported a MiG

Above, LTJG T. T. Scambo loses his hook point during carrier qualifications aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47) on 4 April 1950. (USN)

closing from behind. The F9s made a high-g turn to evade and the MiG passed by harmlessly. Meanwhile, the second MiG formation dove through and engaged Kelly's group. They shook off the attackers and three Panthers pursued them north. Kelly's 4th pilot had flamed-out and after an air-start resumed the chase. Davidson, whose group was also in pursuit, closed to within firing distance of a MiG, but upon pressing the firing button nothing happened. Thus the MiGs safely exited the area. The gun failure proved to be due to frozen grease, so all grease was removed on future missions and the guns were fired dry.

On the 13th, during a second attack on the Sinuiju bridges, Davidson got another crack at the MiGs. Three groups of MiGs were spotted and the fight was soon on. The MiGs attacked in a diving spiral, and dropped their tanks. As they flashed past Davidson, he fired and scored hits on the last attacking MiG. He then fired on a second MiG without success, then a third and forth, again with no results as they outdived the Panthers. Then, while pursuing a fifth MiG over the city, the MiG was hit by anti-aircraft fire.

Meanwhile, the skippers group dove on a MiG division from their perch at 32,000 feet. CO, LCDR Simmons, and his wingman Fred Weber pursued a climbing MiG. In the ensuing melee, both pilots were able to fire a short burst, but with no results. They re-acquired the MiG at a lower altitude, and Weber fired and scored positive hits. The MiG flew over the Yalu at high speed and was seen exploding over Manchuria. The kill was confirmed by five pilots from the Valley Forge. That would be the last of the Tomcatter's MiG engagements.

The Air Group continued to attack the bridges and eventually dropped them but the Chinese just crossed the Yalu on its frozen surface. On 2 December, the missions switched to interdiction and troop concentrations.

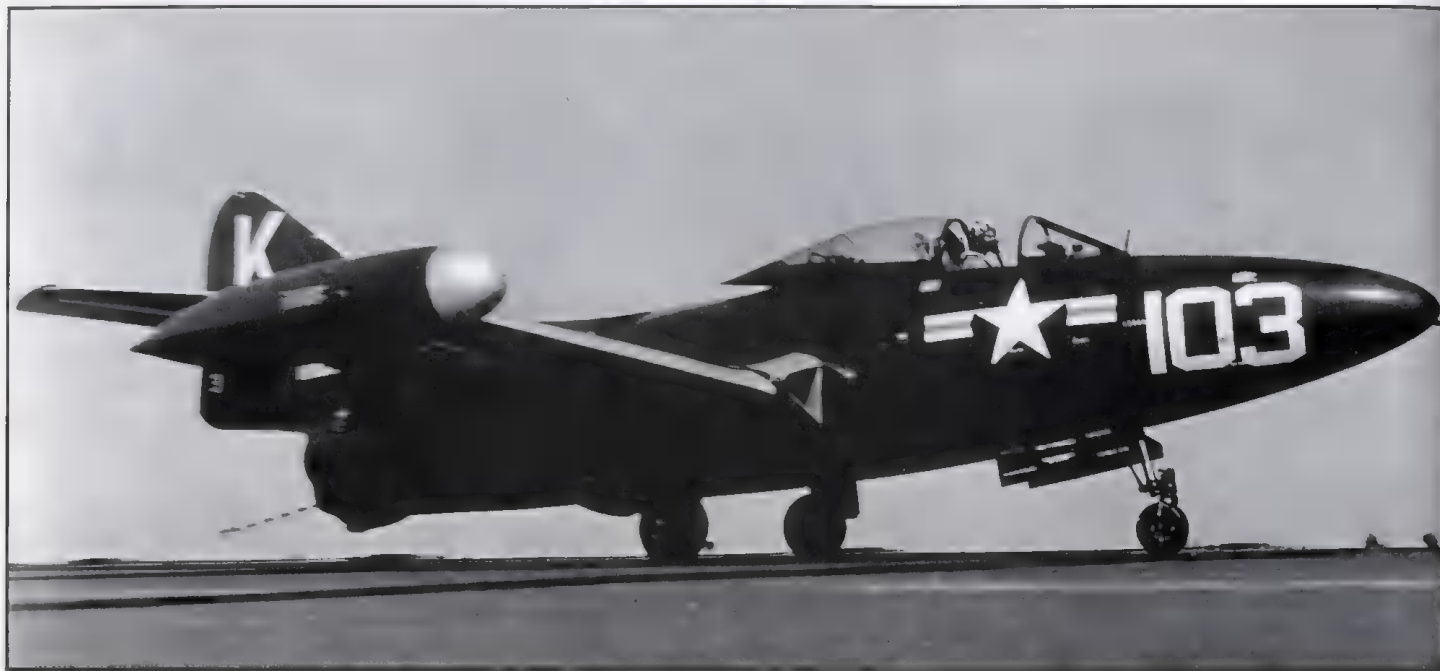


On Christmas day, the Leyte left the line after 50 days of continuous combat. After returning on line, VF-31 conducted two weeks of CAP missions over Seoul and Wonju before retiring to Japan. Once in Japan, the Tomcatters flew ashore to NAS Atsugi where their Panthers were left for replacements. The Leyte departed Japan on 20 January 1951 and

Above, VF-31 CO LCDR George Simmons taxis after returning from a combat mission over Korea on 15 November 1950. Fin tip was red. (USN)
Below, three VF-31 F9F-2 Panthers aboard the USS Leyte (CV-32) on 9 August 1951. (National Archives)

arrived at Norfolk on 25 February where all VF-31 hands received 30





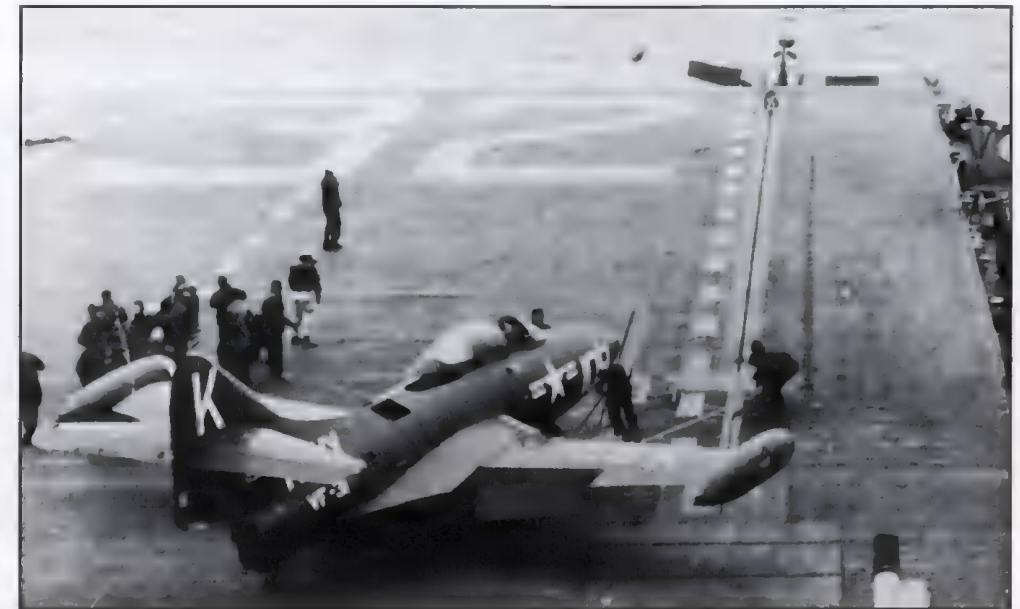
Above, ENS Dodd makes the 23,000th landing aboard the USS Leyte (CV-32) on 14 August 1950. (National Archives) Below, the USS Leyte crosses the International Date Line during rough seas on 29 September 1950. VF-31 F9F-2 Panthers are tied down on the bow. (USN via Fred Roos)



At right, a cold catapult shot sends LT "Red Dog" Davis into the drink in the Sea of Japan during VF-31's Korean War deployment. Many years later he became Commander-In-Chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC). (USN) Below, VF-31 launch operations in the MED in 1951 with two aircraft launched almost in unison and two aircraft being spotted for launch. (USN)

days leave before reporting to NAS Quonset Point.

In June through July, the squadron was aboard the USS Midway (CVB-41) for a two-month deployment. Then, on 29 August, VF-31 departed aboard the USS Leyte for a routine Mediterranean deployment that lasted until 4 February 1952. During this cruise, the ship stopped at Gibraltar, Syracuse, Augusta, Catania, Taormina,



Genoa, Naples, Cannes, La Spezia, Suda Bay, Piragus, Izmir, and Algiers.

1953 found the squadron transitioning, first to F2H-2 and then F2H-3 Banshees. In 1956, the F3H-2N Demon

replaced the F2H-3 "Big Banjos" which, in-turn, were replaced with the McDonnell F-4B Phantom II in 1963. The squadron's long association with the Phantom ended in 1980 when the Tomcatters received Tomcats.



FIGHTER SQUADRON THIRTY - FOUR, VF-34 "BLUE BLASTERS"



VF-20 was established on 15 October 1943. Fighting Twenty operated the Grumman F6F-3/-5 Hellcat during World War Two. VF-20 transitioned to the Grumman F8F-1 Bearcat in April 1946 and became VF-9A on 15 November 1946. On 12 August 1948 they became VF-91 and upgraded to the F8F-2 on 3 December 1948. The squadron was redesignated VF-34 on 15 February 1950 and received the F9F-2 on 27 November 1950.

VF-34 made a short deployment aboard the USS Tarawa (CV-40) in the vicinity of Guantanamo Bay from January through May of 1951. This

was followed three weeks later by a short cruise aboard the USS Midway (CVB-41) and a Mediterranean deployment from 29 August 1951 aboard the USS Leyte for a routine Mediterranean deployment that lasted until 4 February 1952.

On 14 February 1952, the squadron started to transition to the F2H-2 Banshee. The squadron was redesignated VA-34 on 1 July 1955 and transitioned to the F7U-3 Cutlass in October. In January 1957 the A4D-1 Skyhawk was received and the squadron would fly the A4D-2, A4D-2N (A-4C) before being disestablished on 1 June 1969.

Below, VF-34 F9F-2 being spotted on CV-32 in 1951. (USN) Bottom, ENS R. Joeske makes the 34,000th landing aboard the USS Leyte (CV-32) on 6 August 1951. Nose and fin tip markings were yellow. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON FORTY - THREE, VF-43 "FALCONS"



VF-43 was established on 1 September 1950 at NAS Jacksonville, FL, with the F4U-5 Corsair. The F4U-4 was acquired in 1952 and the F9F-5 Panther in early 1953.

The squadron was assigned to Air Group Three for its world cruise aboard the USS Tarawa (CVA-40) from November 1953 through September 1954. The squadron visited fourteen ports in ten different countries and passed through both the Suez and Panama Canals.

F9F-6/8 Cougars were flown from early 1955 through April 1958 when the F8U-1 first arrived. VF-43 was redesignated VF-11 on 16 September



Above, VF-43 F9F-5 Panther is tensioned on CVA-40. (USN) Below, row of VF-43 Panthers prep for a mission from CVA-40. (USN) Bottom, forward flight deck of the Tarawa in May 1954 with VF-102 Panthers (P tail code) and VF-43 Panthers (F tail code) flanking VC-62 F2H-2P photo Banshees. The fin above the F tail code, rudder and nose flash seem to be orange. (USN)



1959 and adopted the insignia and traditions of the previous VF-11 which was disestablished the previous day.



FIGHTER SQUADRON FIFTY - ONE, VF-51 "SCREAMING EAGLE"



The Screaming Eagles started out in 1927 as VF-3S flying the Curtiss F6C-4. The squadron designation was soon changed to VF-3B and the Boeing FB-5 replaced the F6C-4. In 1929, the FB-5 gave way to

the Boeing F3B-1 which was traded for the Boeing F4B-4 in 1931. In 1935 the retractable gear Grumman F2F-1 joined the squadron. In 1937 the squadron was redesignated VF-5B and upgraded to the Grumman F3F-3. When war broke out on 7 December 1941, the squadron was equipped with Grumman F4F-3 Wildcats.

VF-5B was disestablished on 7 January 1943, and most of the squadron's assets including personnel were assigned to the newly-established VF-1. Flying Grumman F6F Hellcats, VF-1 was redesignated VF-5 on 15 July 1943. The squadron finished out the war in Vought F4U Corsairs and was redesignated VF-5A on 15 November 1946 while flying the Grumman F8F-1 Bearcat. The

Bearcat was replaced by the North American FJ-1 Fury on 18 November 1947 and VF-5A became the first Navy fleet squadron to operationally deploy jets at sea.

The Screaming Eagles were once again redesignated on 16 August 1948, when they were given their current designation of VF-51. Grumman F9F-3 Panthers replaced

Below, VF-51 F9F-3 122580 aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) on 13 September 1949 during carrier trials off the coast of Southern California. According to captions on this series of photos, the camera man was filming the Panthers for a movie titled "Eagles of the Navy" (USN via Fred Roos)

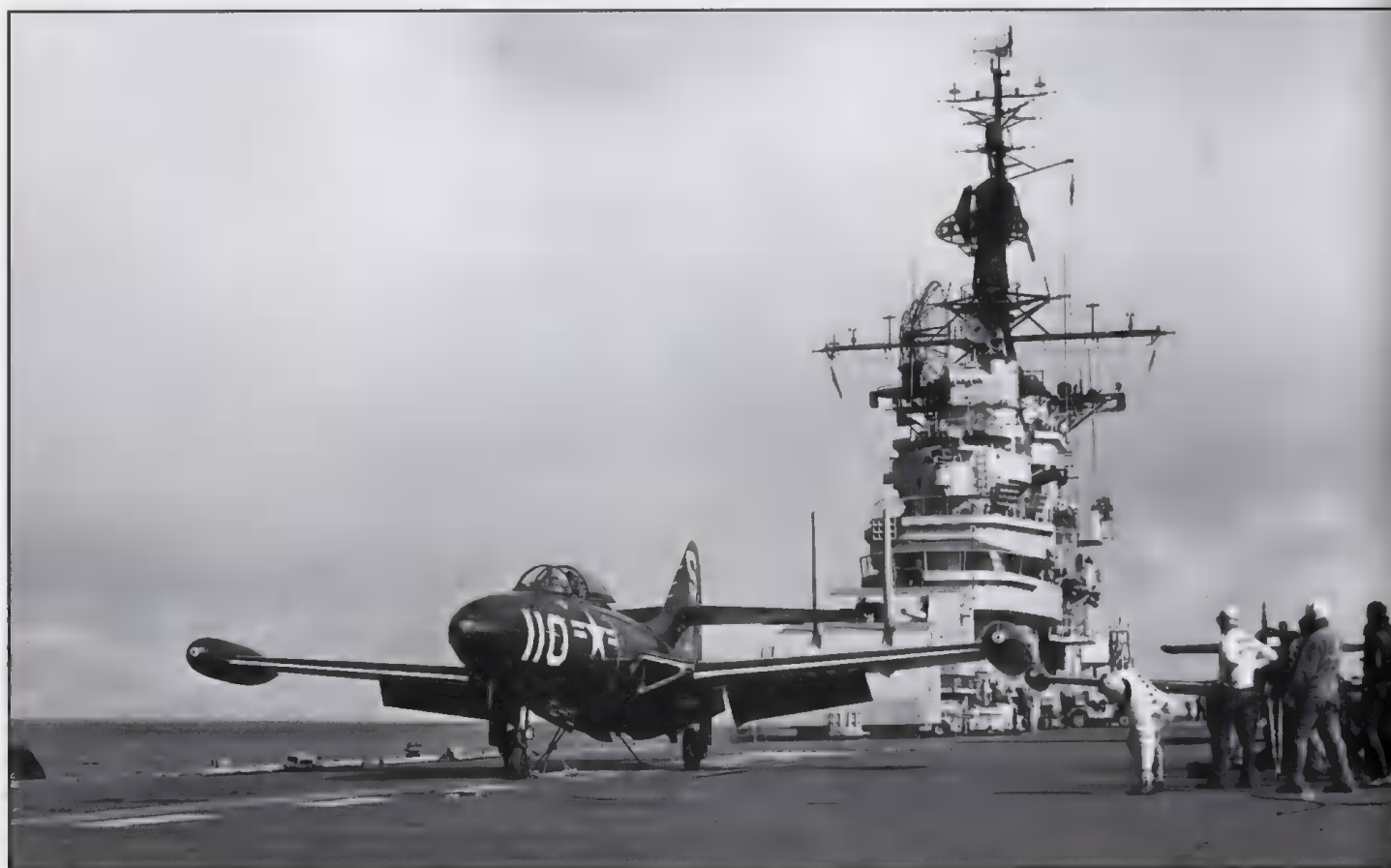


Above, VF-51 F9F-3 108/S landing aboard the Boxer on 14 September 1949. (USN) Below, VF-51 launch operations on 13 September 1949 aboard the Boxer. (USN)





Above, "Man Your Aircraft"! VF-51 pilot enters the cockpit of his F9F-3 Panther in preparation to launch from the USS Boxer on 13 September 1949. (USN) Below, VF-51 F9F-3 110/S is given the launch signal from the catapult officer. (USN)



the Furies and the squadron flew F9F-2/2Bs, F9F-3s and F9F-5s during three Korean War deployments.

Prior to Korea, VF-51 took their Panthers aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) for a West Coast test deployment of the type in September 1949.

The first war cruise started out as a peaceful deployment to the Far East aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) on 28 April 1950. Then on 25 June, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the Valley Forge became the first US carrier to launch air

strikes against Korea.

On the day the North invaded the South, the Valley Forge was on her way to Subic Bay, P. I., for replenishment. The "Happy Valley" and her escorts with Commander Task Force 77 RADM John "Pegleg" Hoskins embarked, loaded stores and fuel and set course toward Sasebo, Japan. On 1 July, TF-77 along with the British carrier HMS Triumph and its escort the HMS Belfast, left Buckner Bay to prepare for a strike against the North Korean capitol. On 3 July, the Navy's first strike was launched with the

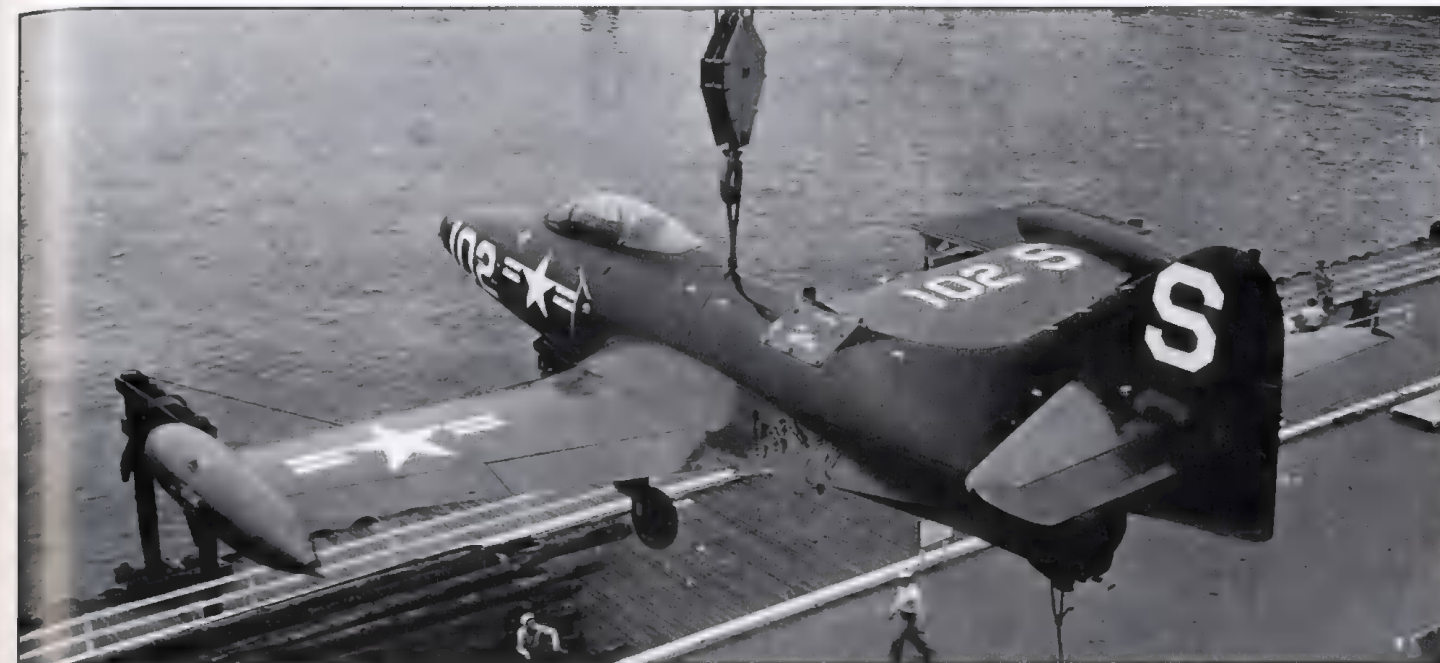
Above, VF-51 F9F-3 122582 on 30 October 1949. Note squadron insignia just below the windscreen. (W. J. Balogh via Dave Menard) Bottom, VF-51 F9F-3 122575 taxis clear of the wires after arresting aboard the USS Boxer on 13 September 1949. (National Archives)

Corsairs and Skyraiders taking off first. Last off was VF-51's Panthers led by CAG Henry P. Lanham and squadron CO Dave Pollock. It was intended that VF-51 would arrive





Above, four VF-51 F9F-3s over Mt. Palomar on 22 December 1949. (via SDAM) Below, two VF-51 F9F-3s in flight on 1 December 1949 over Southern California. (USN)



Above and below, VF-51 F9F-3 122577 being handled aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) in June 1949. (National Archives)





At left, Yak Killer, LTJG Leonard Plog in public relations photo aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) in July 1950. Note the fresh kill mark applied to the fuselage. (National Archives via Jim Burridge) Below, F9F-3 123071 was the aircraft that LTJG Leonard Plog used when he became the first Naval Aviator to shoot down an enemy aircraft in Korea. (National Archives via Jim Burridge)

and line-up the shot, then retracted his speed brakes and fired. The inboard panel of the Yak's left wing flew off and it rolled left into the ground. With this kill, LTJG Len Plog had claimed the first Naval air-to-air victory of the Korean War.

A few minutes after Plog's kill, ENS Elden W. "Little Head" Brown scored the Navy's second kill of the war by downing another Yak-9. It was a good day for the Navy as all aircraft returned safely to the Valley Forge.

On 18 July, LCDR Pollock launched with two divisions of Panthers in support of the 1st Cavalry Division landings at Pohang. One

slightly ahead of Air Group Five's prop planes. As they arrived over target and were descending through 10,000 feet the anti-aircraft gunfire commenced, but was thankfully ineffective. They also noted Yak-9s taking off from the airfields below and the XO, LCDR Bill Sisley, slid in

behind one and got off a few rounds but was unable to down the Yak. LTJG Len Plog had followed him in and being unable to finish the job, Sisley started pulled in behind a second Yak that was taking off. As he pulled in behind the Yak he dropped his speed brakes to slow his speed



Above, VF-51 F9F-2B takes a wave-off from aboard the USS Essex (CV-9) on 18 July 1951. (USN) Below, F9F-2B 127128 on a photo escort mission over Changdae Point, North Korea, on 4 September 1951. Note the squadron insignia is located aft of the canopy. Fin tip was red. (USN via SDAM)

division was dispatched north to attack Wonsan airfield where they also sank a 60-foot sampan. They

also found and reported an oil refinery that had been hit by B-29s but was still functioning. Attack aircraft were called in to finish off the refinery. The second Panther division attacked the air field at Pyongyang, where a dozen or so aircraft were destroyed on the ground.

On 21 July, VF-51 launched fighter sweeps along the west coast of Korea. Ammo dumps at Ongjin were strafed, a factory at Haeju was hit, as well as rail yards at Yonan, five air-

craft at Kimpo was destroyed, and finally oil tanks at Inchon.

After a replenishment stop at Sasebo, attacks continued on 25 July. The squadron struck boxcars, trucks, command cars, and a locomotive on and near Kwangju airfield. VF-51 finished out July 1950 with armed reconnaissance flights on the 28th.

During August 1950, the squadron decimated six troop carrying junks, attacked Kimpo airfield,



strafed rail cars near Sinmack, and blew up three locomotives and two large oil tanks at Hamhung. Even though air operations were limited to less than 20-days, the squadron still lost one its pilots. On the 12th, ENS John H. Nyhuis was lost while strafing two armored trains about 50 miles north of Seoul near Kumchon.

All of VF-51's missions in September were in support of the amphibious landings at Inchon and their movements inland. Tommy Thompson's aircraft was riddled with 85 holes during an attack on a freight train by his division. On the first pass, the center section of the train blew up and Tommy Thompson flew through the fireball. Despite the damage, Thompson was able to safely land back aboard the ship. During this operation, from 12 September through 3 October, the squadron flew eight TarCaps, 163 CAP missions and 93 offensive missions.

During October 1950, snow hit the Task Force heavily, limiting flights to only 35 armed reconnaissance missions from 12 to 28 October.

On 9 November 1950, VF-51's mission changed to supporting the Air Force's B-29 missions. The Panthers would dive in ahead of the B-29s and attack anti-aircraft batteries in and

around the target area. On the 12th, the squadron encountered MiG-15s for the first time while attacking along the Yalu. Luckily, the MiG pilots were just as surprised as the Panther pilots and did not engage them.

Flight operations for VF-51's first war cruise ended on 19 November 1950, when the ship left the line for home. First stop was Yokosuka, Japan, where eight VF-51 F9F-3s were off-loaded for continued usage in the Korean theater. The first war cruise ended on 1 December 1950 when the Happy Valley sailed into San Diego, CA.

The squadron re-grouped around the four remaining veterans from the first war cruise and their new CO, LCDR Ernest Beauchamp. 24 new pilots were acquired, including future CNO Thomas B. Hayward and Astronaut Neil Armstrong. Initially the squadron was equipped with the four F9F-3s they brought back from Korea. In January 1951, a few of the much more capable F9F-2B Panthers arrived. The F9F-2Bs were capable of carrying bombs and rockets on their wings where the F9F-3 could not carry any.

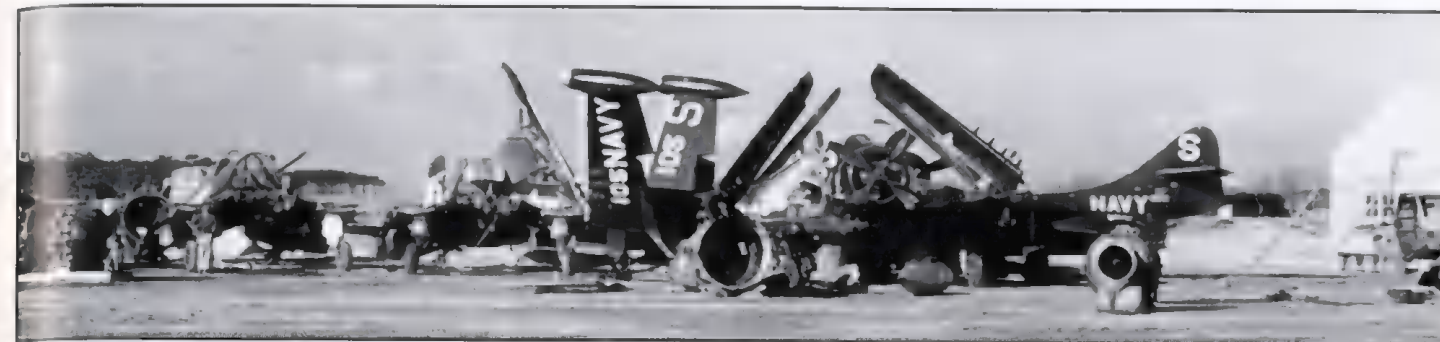
During the training cycle, the squadron lost ENS R.L. Gardner on 18 April 1951. He had attempted an

overly-aggressive landing break at 900 feet and abruptly snap-rolled the aircraft into the ground.

The squadron carrier qualified on the 7th and 8th of June, aboard the USS Essex (CV-9). On the 26th, VF-51 left San Diego on its second war cruise with 16 F9F-2B aircraft and 24 pilots. The Essex joined the battle line off Korea on 23 August 1951.

On the 25th of June, VF-51 flew one of its most important missions of 1951. The mission, led by CAG Marsh Beede in a VF-51 Panther and planned by CO Beauchamp, was to escort B-29s to the formerly restricted target of Rashin. Eleven VF-51 F9F-2Bs and twelve VF-172 F2H-2 Banshees escorted the B-29s on the successful destruction of the railhead marshalling yards, turntable, roundhouse, and about 75 rail cars. The Panthers flew low cover off the port and starboard of the B-29s, while the Banshees flew top cover.

Below, two VF-51 F9F-2Bs escorting a VC-61 F9F-2P back to the USS Essex fly past the USS Princeton (CV-37) on 16 July 1951 after a photo mission. (USN)



Above, boneyard at K-3 Korea with two VF-51 F9F-2Bs interned. The one at right was missing its wing tip. (via Gene Holmberg) Below, VF-51 F9F-2B aboard the Essex in June 1951. The rudder tip was yellow. (USN via John Elliott)

VF-51's main mission during the cruise was interdiction, which was generally flown based on a three-plane group. The system designed by LCDR Beauchamp called for one aircraft at 500 feet spotting targets, a second aircraft at about 4,500 feet to attack those targets, and a third aircraft at 10,000 feet to provide cover, navigation and safety.

On 29 August 1951, the Essex flew more than 100 sorties. This feat was repeated on 10 September when 101 sorties were flown. On 3 September, ENS Neil Armstrong was hit on a mission against the freight yards near Wonsan. He safely nursed the stricken aircraft less two feet of his starboard wing to K-3 where he successfully bailed out. He was picked up by an Essex COD TBM and was on the flight schedule the next day.

LTJG John Carpenter was lost on 4 September while attacking a truck

and later the same day, LTJG Bramwell was shot down by flak near Wonsan.

On 10 September, after returning from a mission, LT John Moore was blown over the side of the Essex while still in his aircraft when a VF-172 Banshee jumped the barrier and crashed into the previously recovered aircraft. For a complete story of this event see F9F Panther Part One, Naval Fighters Number 59.

October and November of 1951 consisted of armed recon missions primarily targeting rail and road traffic. It was during this period that the Air Group was attacking the Samdong-ni bridge while James Michener was aboard Essex. This would be the theme of his book and movie "The Bridges of Toko-Ri".

On 9 December, while on a rail line mission near Hungnam, CAG

Beebe's Panther was hit in the ammo bay and his wingman LT F. J. Prendergast was hit in the engine compartment. The CAG made it back to the ship but LT Prendergast was forced to bail out at sea when his engine seized due to oil starvation. He was rescued by the USS McGinty (DE-365) and returned to Essex.

In January 1952, two VF-51 pilots were lost. Both were lost on rail cutting missions due to flak. ENS "Rick" Rickleton was lost on the 6th and LTJG L. R. Cheshire was lost on the 26th. From 5 February through 1 March, Air Group Five concentrated





Above, two VF-51 F9F-5s aboard the Valley Forge. The natural metal Panther has a yellow fin tip flash above S tail code. (via Pima Air and Space Museum) Below, VF-51 F9F-5 with collapsed main gear. (Ken Bromwell via Warren Thompson) Bottom, VF-51 Panthers on Valley Forge. (Ken Bromwell via Warren Thompson)

on Communist supply and transport targets North of Wonson.



Marshall, Bob McNaught, Herschell Gott, and Bill Bowers. The squadron, now transferred to NAS Miramar, started flying the F9F-5 Panther in September 1952. On 20 November, the squadron boarded the USS Valley Forge (CVA-45) for the squadron's third war cruise.

The squadron's first strikes were conducted on 2 January 1953 against Hongwon and Hungnam. On 24 February, Tom Hayward crashed off the bow during a soft catapult launch. Luckily, he was recovered with only minor injuries. By this time, VF-51 mission tactics had changed to flak suppression. The Panthers would go in first with fragmentation bombs and lead the bombers in, then strafe gun sites to protect the Air Group.

On 9 March, the squadron lost its first and only pilot of the cruise. LTJG Ken Gedney was lost on a flak suppression mission to the billeting areas at Sangama-ni. On 1 April, LTJG Thabet was hit by a 37mm shell near Kowon and ejected over the sea where he was picked up by helicopter. Unfortunately, he suffered back injuries. On 3 May, Earnie Russell crashed near the ship after being hit near Hungnam and was rescued by helicopter.

The Happy Valley left the line for the last time on 5 June 1953. The squadron had flown 1,853 sorties, lost three aircraft and had been hit 26 times.

In late 1953, F9F-6 Cougars replaced the Panthers, which were replaced with North American FJ-3 Furies in 1955. The squadron transitioned to the supersonic Grumman F11F-1 Tiger in 1958 only to reequip with Douglas F4D-1 Skyrajs in January 1959. On 10 November 1960, the squadron transitioned to the Vought F8U Crusader. The squadron spent ten years in Crusaders and transitioned to the McDonald F-4B Phantom II in November 1970. F-4Ns were acquired in early 1974 and the F-14A Tomcat was acquired on 16 June 1978. The squadron was disestablished on 16 February 1995.

FIGHTER SQUADRON FIFTY - TWO, VF-52 "SEALANCERS"



VF-52 was originally established as VBF-5 on 8 May 1945. Flying the F6F Hellcat, VBF-5 was redesignated VF-6A on 15 November 1946. The squadron was redesignated VF-52 on 16 August 1948.

With F9F-2 Panthers as part of CVG-5, aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45), VF-52 took part in the first carrier strike of the Korean War on 3 July 1950. The deployment was conducted from 28 April through 1 December 1950.

As part of ATG-1, VF-52 conducted its second war cruise aboard the USS Valley Forge from 15 October 1951 through 3 July 1952 with F9F-2s. While conducting work-ups in November, LT Alan W. Duck was killed on a cat shot off the coast of Korea. On 11 December 1951, combat operations commenced with an attack on rail lines and rail bridges in eastern Korea. LTJG David F. Tatum ditched his Panther astern the Valley Forge on 28 December 1951 after it had flamed-out. On 17 January 1952, in concert with VF-653, VF-52 damaged a supply train and dropped three bridges. During their first month on line, the squadron lost one aircraft and had five damaged. On 19 February, the squadron lost LTJG Tatum when he hit a mountain while pulling up off target after a strafing run. On 17 March, tragedy struck the squadron once more, as the Sealancer's skipper, LCDR Herbert L. Baslee, was killed on the initial attack on enemy gun emplacements. LCDR



J. J. Kinsella was transferred from VF-111, VF-52's sister squadron, to assume command. On the 20th of March, LT M. P. Smith flew ATG-1's 12,000th combat sortie of the cruise. The following day, LTJG Charles G. Strahley was killed attempting to bail out of his burning Panther off the coast of Hungnam. Two aircraft were lost on 2 May 1952. LTJG R. J. Lear discovered that his tailhook could not be lowered, and was diverted to K-18 along with his section leader LTJG W. S. Parr. Due to battle damage and a

Above, VF-52 F9F-2 pulling forward to the launch position on CV-45. (Frank Jones via Warren Thompson) Below, pilot and deck crew prepare to start a VF-52 Panther in 1950. (USN)

possible fuel leak, Lear flamed-out and ditched 35 miles short of the field and Parr flamed-out on final. These were the last incidents to befall the squadron before returning home.

During the squadron's third war



Below, VF-52 Panther is muscled into position prior to a strike over Korea aboard the "Happy Valley". Aircraft has four 250 pound bombs fitted to each wing. (USN)



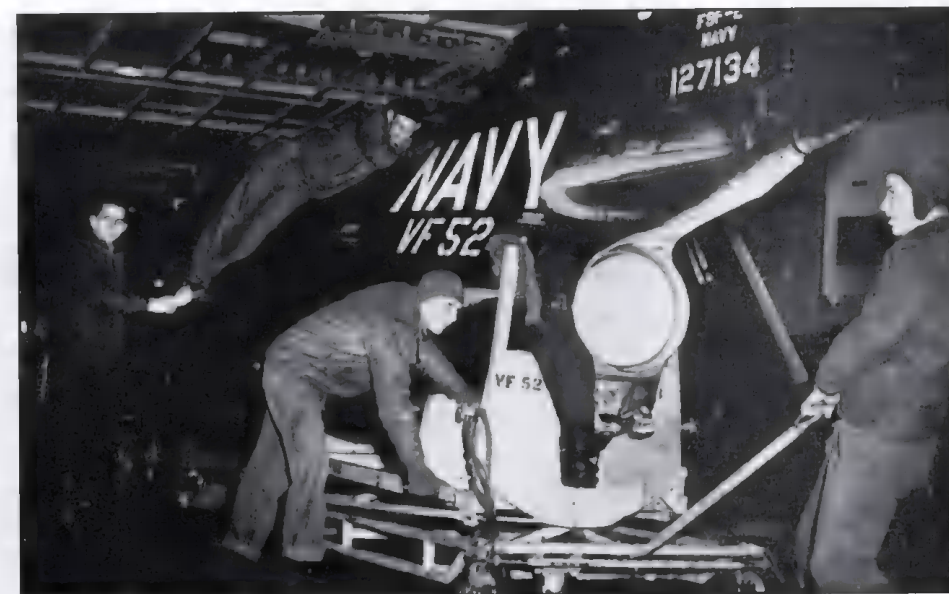
cruise aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) from 30 March through 28 November 1953, "Kinsella's Fellas" night hecklers were formed by VF-52's Commanding Officer LCDR James J. Kinsella. It was his conviction that jet aircraft could be used successfully in night combat operations. Because of the jet's high speed and its silent approach, he felt the Panthers could strike their targets before the North Koreans could extinguish their lights. Since none of his squadron pilots were trained for night work, LCDR Kinsella lead the first night mission off the Boxer to demonstrate the soundness and effectiveness of this new concept in jet operations.

On the night of 25 May 1953, "Kinsella's Fellas" launched for its first night intradiction mission. The flight consisted of LCDR Kinsella, LT Paul A. Hayek, LT Richard A. Dadisman and LTJG William N. Brook. The flight split in two and swept the 75-mile coastal supply route from Pukchong to Chongjin with great success. Kinsella and Dadisman took the northern end and Hayek and Brook

covered the southern end.

With Panthers, VF-52 had flown the first and last jet missions in the Korean War and had made three combat cruises to Korea.

The Sealancers made a post-war WESTPAC cruise with Panthers aboard the USS Wasp (CVA-18) from 1 September 1954 through May 1955



Above, VF-52 F9F-2 tail assembly is pulled off the forward fuselage to access the engine aboard the Valley Forge. (USN) Below, VF-52 F9F-2 being spotted after landing aboard (CV-45) during carrier trials in January 1950. Nose and vertical fin markings were white. (USN via John Elliott)

as part of ATG-1 once again.





Above, VF-52 F9F-2 123073 off Korea in 1952. (USN via Craig Kaston) Below, VF-52 F9F-2s 127126 (210/S) and 123634 (208/S) from the USS Boxer (CVA-21) escort a VC-61 F2H-2P photo Banshee back from the squadron's last combat mission of the war in July 1953. (USN)



VF-52 USS WASP 1954/55

Above, VF-52 officers and chiefs aboard the USS Wasp (CVA-18) in 1954. Bottom row left to right: Nadler, Dean, Sherman, Kaiser, Burkmeyer, Budnick, Erwin, Barnes, Drummet, and Pruett. Middle row: O'Dowd, Miller, Culberson, Gay, Shepherd, Simons, Perkins, Johnson, Neville, and Whitman. Top row: Williams, Pollard, Cowen, Vanderpol, Wright, Avery, Field, Ott, Kinsey, and Smith. (USN)

At right, VF-52 armorors loading one 5" rocket and two 250 pound bombs on each wing of a squadron Panther aboard the USS Wasp (CVA-18) in 1955. (USN)





VF-52 USS WASP 1954/55

At left, VF-52 Panther takes a wave-off from the LSO aboard the USS Wasp (CVA-18) in 1955. Nose and tail markings were white. Note locations of underwing codes. (USN) Below, VF-52 Panthers 211/S and 204/S prepare to launch on a mission off the coast of Formosa in 1955. (USN)

The squadron transitioned to the F2H-3 Banshee in 1955 and was disestablished on 23 February 1959.



FIGHTER SQUADRON FIFTY - THREE, VF-53 "BLUE KNIGHTS"



In 1948, under the command of LCDR W. D. Hubbell, the squadron was organized as part of Air Group Five with Grumman F8F Bearcats. 1949 brought a new Commanding Officer, LCDR W. R. Pittman, and a new aircraft, the Chance Vought F4U Corsair. The squadron was in the Far East aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) when the Korean War broke out. The ship was ordered to Korea in June 1950 and launched its first strike on 3 July. The squadron returned to San Diego in November 1950.

A second Corsair war cruise took place aboard the USS Essex (CV-9) from June 1951 through April 1952. CDR Trum was relieved by LCDR

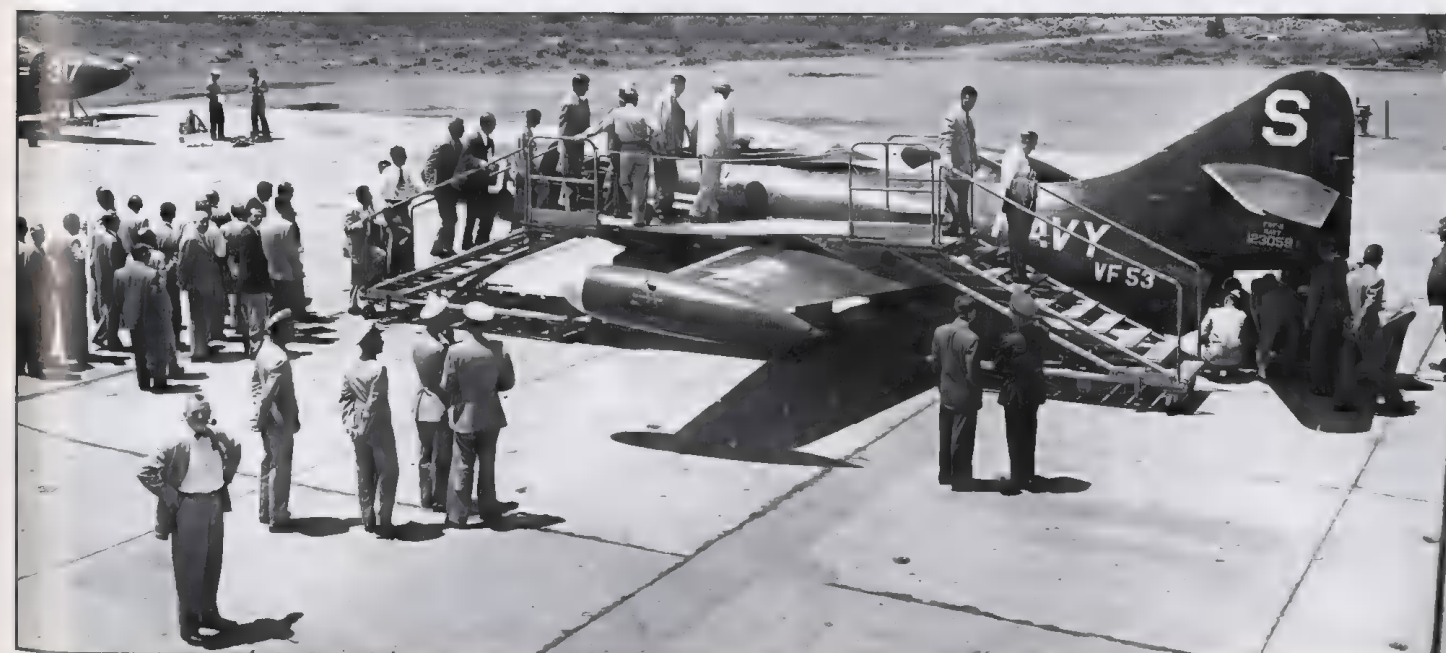
Lawrence B. Green at NAS San Diego and the squadron transitioned to the Grumman F9F-2 Panther.

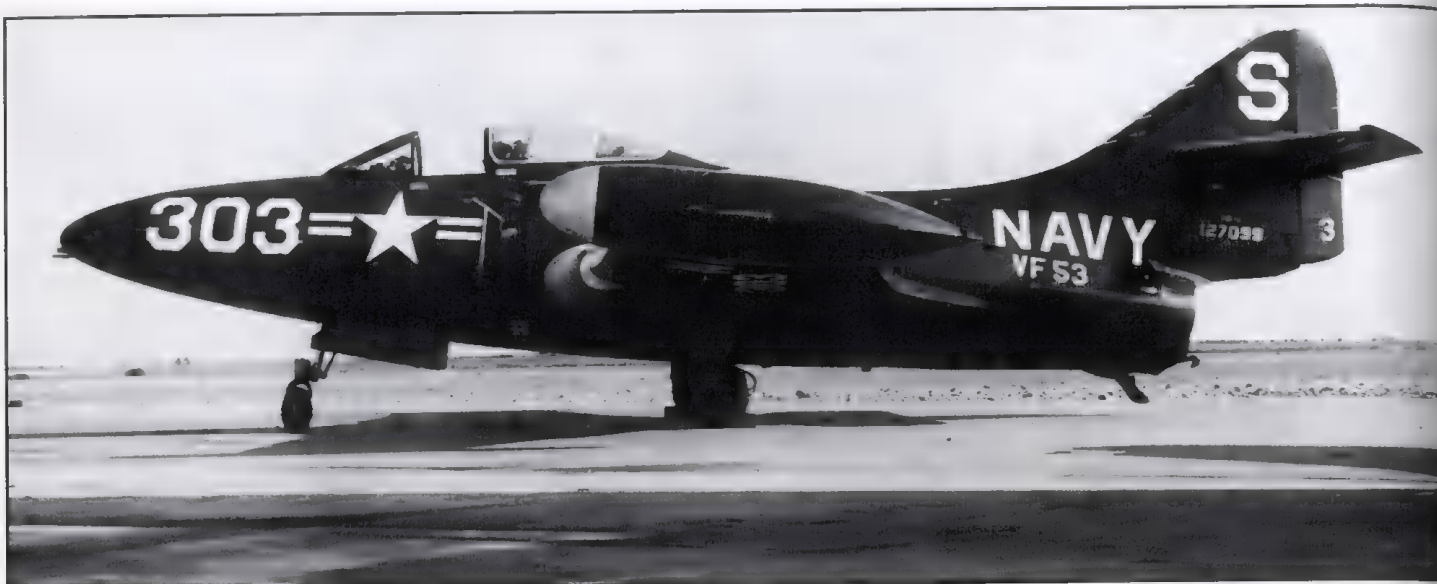
In the summer of 1952, F9F-5s replaced the F9F-2s and the squadron spent most of September and October conducting weapons training with 20mm guns, HVAR rockets and practice bombs. Close air support work was accomplished at the Carrizo Impact Area. All pilots qualified in bombing, rockets and strafing with LCDR Charles Mulligan's division being the top scorers.

Following a short period of day and night FCLP, carquals were suc-

Above, VF-53 F9F-5 Panther taxis out of the arresting gear on the Valley Forge. (via Bob Lawson) Below, group of dignitaries inspect a VF-53 F9F-2 Panther. (SDAM)

cessfully completed on the Valley Forge. The squadron departed San Diego for its third war cruise on 20 November 1952. After the "Happy Valley" arrived on station, it participated in coordinated strikes with Corsair squadrons VF-54 and VF-92 against heavy flak-protected sites. On an attack at the power station at Tanchon, CDR Green's flight successfully silenced 38 Korean gun





positions and helped destroy the target.

The squadron's second cruise was aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) from 12 March through 19 November 1954. After routine WestPac operations the carrier and Air Group became involved in an international incident on 22 July 1954 when an Air Cathay airliner was shot

down by two Red Chinese La-7 fighters. During the search and rescue efforts, the Air Group was attacked by two more La-7s which were ultimately shot down by Air Group Skyraiders and Corsairs.

In 1955, VF-53 replaced its Panthers with F9F-8 Cougars and in 1957, the FJ-3M Fury took over. The squadron was redesignated VF-124

Above, VF-53 F9F-2 127099 with the last digit of the nose number repeated on the rudder. (NMNA) Bottom, VF-53 F9F-5 minus nose is being manhandle on the deck of the Valley Forge. The fin tip was painted blue. (NMNA)

on 11 April 1958 and disestablished on 30 September 1994.



FIGHTER SQUADRON SIXTY - ONE, VF-61 "JOLLY ROGERS"



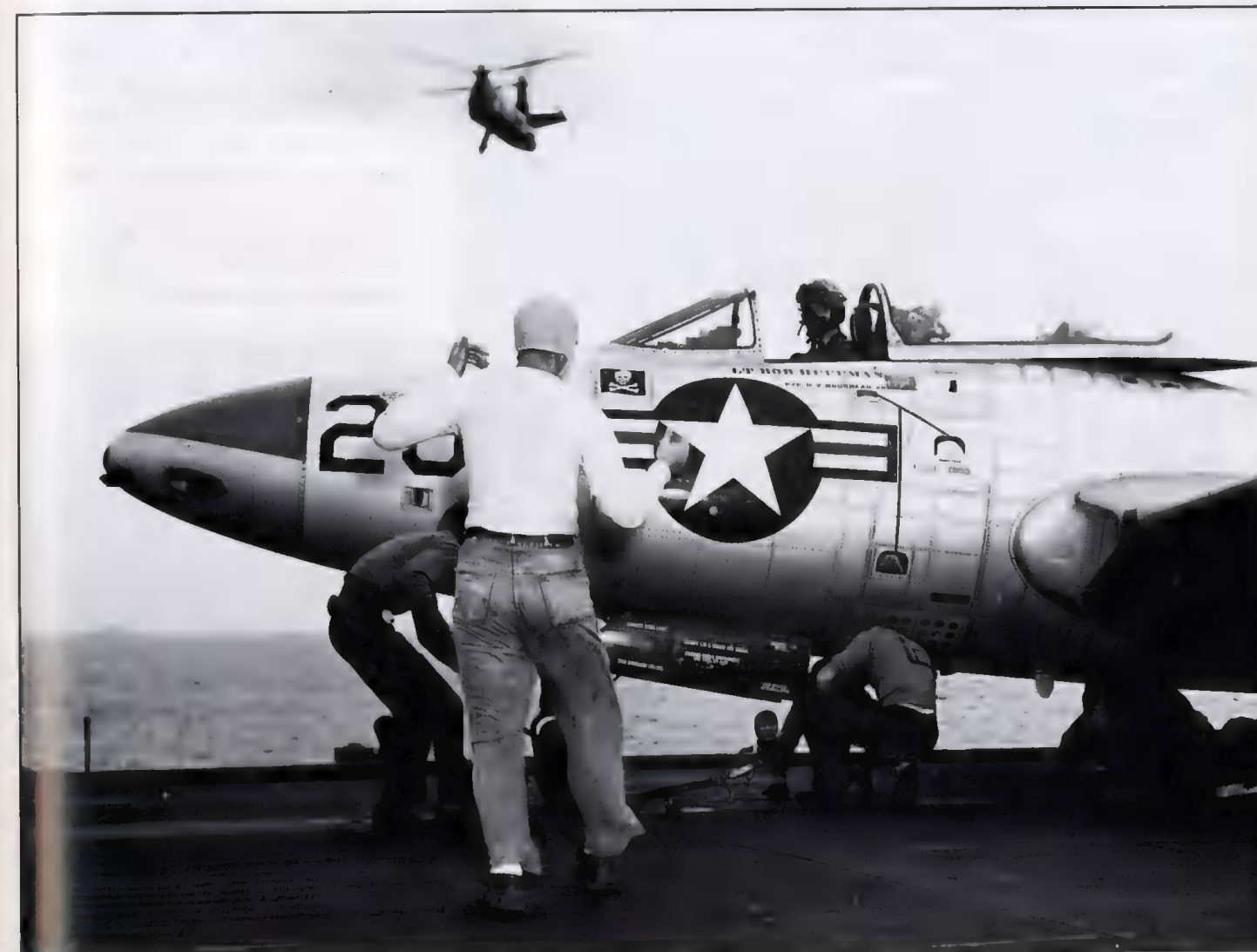
ignated VF-5B on 15 November 1946. VF-5B was redesignated VF-61 on 28 July 1948 and transitioned to Grumman F8F-2 Bearcats. The Grumman F9F-2 Panther was acquired in April 1950.

In December 1950, ENS Guy Thrower was binged ashore to Nassau, New Providence Island, Bahamas, because his hook could not be lowered. Weather was encountered inroute, which ate up precious fuel. With Oakes Field in sight and the gear and flaps down, the Panther's engine quit. Thrower sucked-up his gear and slid to a stop 500 yards short of the runway. Although damaged, the aircraft was repairable and two VMR-252 R4Q Packets were dispatched to pick up the crated aircraft. With the fuselage

in one aircraft and the tail and wings in another, the Panther was flown to NAS Norfolk for overhaul.

With F9F-2s, VF-61 deployed aboard the USS Midway (CVB-41) for a Mediterranean cruise from 9 January through 8 October 1952. On 28 February the squadron took part in Operation Grand Slam, a joint English, French, Italian and American exercise. The Midway returned to Norfolk on 5 May for some scheduled maintenance and hosted BuAer test aircraft from Pax River during this period. Two short sojourns were con-

Below, natural metal VF-61 F9F-2 during carrier qualifications aboard USS Midway (CVB-41) on 5 November 1951. (National Archives)





ducted to Halifax, Nova Scotia, prior to departing Norfolk on 26 August for NATO exercises in the North Sea. On 12 September, the Midway and Carrier Air Group Six joined the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt (CVB-42), USS Wasp (CV-18), and the USS Wisconsin (BB-64) for Operation Main Brace. The operation ended on 24 September and the ship made a stop at Cherbourg, France, and Plymouth, England, before returning to Norfolk.

A second Panther cruise, with F9F-5s aboard the Midway, took

place from 1 December 1952 through 19 May 1953. The Midway operated as the flagship for Carrier Division Four and participated in NATO exercise Operation Rendezvous before returning to Norfolk.

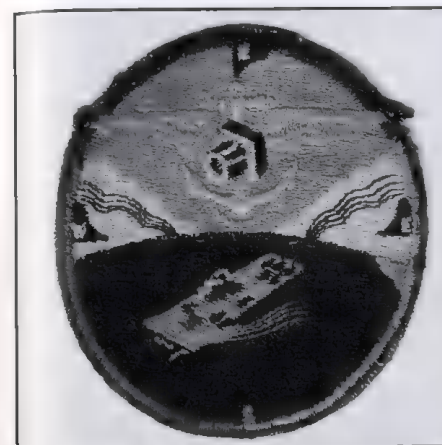
In late 1953 the squadron transitioned to the F9F-6 Cougar. The FJ-3 Fury was received in mid-1955, only to be replaced with the F9F-8 in late 1955. The Cougars were replaced with F3H-2M Demons in September 1956. In 1959, the squadron was scheduled to receive the F8U-2 Crusader, but instead was disestab-

Above, VF-61 F9F-2 flown by ENS Guy Thrower came to rest 500 yards short of the runway at Oakes Field, New Providence Island, Bahamas. He had flamed-out after being bingoed ashore due to his inability to deploy his tailhook. (USN) Below, VF-61 F9F-2 127087 taking off from NAS Oceana on 18 May 1952. Nose and tail trim was white. (National Archives)

lished on 15 April 1959. In June, VF-84 took over the Jolly Roger name, insignia and traditions.



PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITE SQUADRON SIXTY-ONE, VC-61



Composite Squadron Sixty-One (VC-61) was based at NAS Miramar, CA, and was tasked with providing strike photographic reconnaissance services to the Fleet during the Korean War. Flying F4U-4P/5P Corsairs, F9F-2P/5P Panthers and F2H-2P Banshees, the squadron would provide self-sufficient photo detachments to all Pacific Fleet carriers.

VC-61 was established on 1 January 1949 and was redesignated VFP-61 on 2 July 1956. On 1 July 1959 VFP-61 became VCP-63 and then VFP-63 on 1 July 1961. VFP-63 was disestablished in May 1982.

At right, three photos of VC-61 F9F-2P aircraft operating aboard the USS Essex (CV-9). Fin tips were red and nose markings were red and white. Note mission marks and squadron insignia on 72/PP. (Ron Gerdes)





**PHOTOGRAPHIC
COMPOSITE
SQUADRON
SIXTY - ONE, VC-61**

Above, VC-61 F9F-2Ps prepare to launch on a photo recce mission over North Korea. (USN via SDAM) At left, F9F-2P 70 Papa Papa named "Peepin' Tom" and flown by LT Papa San Young prepares for a mission over Korea. (USN via SDAM) Below, VC-61 F9F-2P 54 Papa Papa on 5 March 1951. (USN via SDAM)



Above, 65 Papa Papa flies over San Diego. (National Archives) Below, a flight of three VC-61 photo Panthers enroute to a photo recce mission over North Korea. (USN via SDAM)





**PHOTOGRAPHIC
COMPOSITE
SQUADRON
SIXTY - ONE, VC-61**

At left, VC-61 F9F-2P 155 Papa Papa with "Life" on the nose on the hangar deck of the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) in October 1951. Note mission marks on the fuselage size. (USN)

Below, VC-61 F9F-2Ps "Look" 154 Papa Papa, "Pic" 153 Papa Papa, and "Life" 155 Papa Papa on the flightdeck of the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) on 8 October 1951. (National Archives)

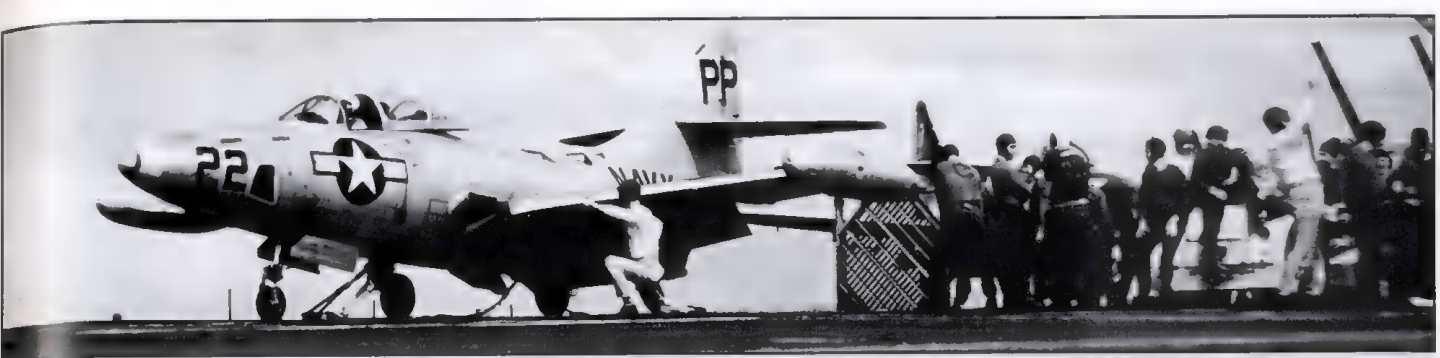


At right, VC-61 F9F-2P 77 Papa Papa shares the deck of the Philippine Sea with two VF-112 F9F-2s in 1952. (USN) Below, VC-61 crewman works on the cameras in 77 Papa Papa while the pilot watches. Note metal plates bolted to the bottom of the equipment rack for ballast. (USN)





Above, natural metal VC-61 F9F-2 with a stylized black Panther jumping through a red 9 on the fuselage side stands by as a VF-51 Panther's guns get final adjustments prior to a mission. The pilot sits at the ready in the cockpit. (via Warren Thompson) Below, two VC-61 pilots wait their turn for launch as VF-51 Panthers move down the deck ahead of them. Note the mission marks painted on the photo birds' sides. (via Warren Thompson)



**PHOTOGRAPHIC
COMPOSITE
SQUADRON
SIXTY - ONE, VC-61**

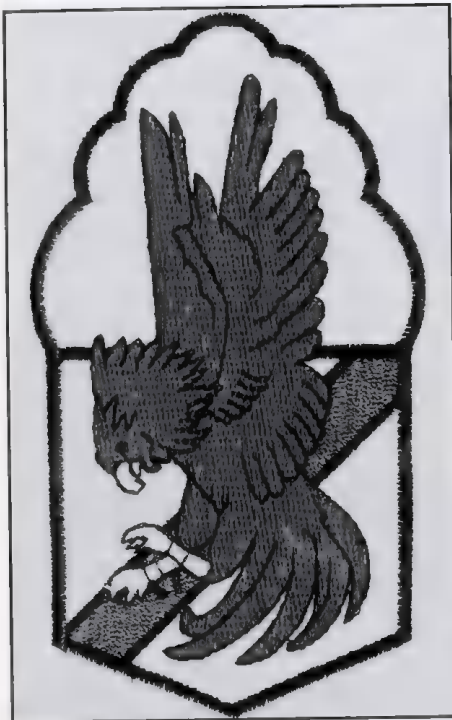
Above, natural metal VC-61 F9F-5P 126266 22 Papa Papa launches from the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) on 4 July 1955. (National Archives) At right, VC-61 F9F-5P 128266 10 Papa Papa on the deck edge elevator of the USS Princeton (CVA-37) in 1953 off the coast of Korea. (USN via Bob Lawson) At right, VC-61 F9F-5P 126268 being lowered to the hangar deck through the deck elevator aboard the USS Princeton in 1953 off the coast of Korea with VF-153 and VF-154 F9F-5s in the background. (USN via Bob Lawson) Bottom, F9F-5P 126266 in storage at NAS Alameda, CA, in 1957. VC-61 had become VFP-61 on 2 July 1956. Note the black anti-glare paint on the upper inboard portion of the wing tip tanks. (William T. Larkins)



PHOTOGRAPHIC SQUADRON SIXTY ONE, VFP-61



FIGHTER SQUADRON SIXTY - THREE, VF-63 "FIGHTING REDCOCKS"



VF-63 was established on 27 July 1948 at NAS Norfolk, VA, with the F8F-2 Bearcat. The Bearcats were replaced with F4U-4 Corsairs in January 1950. The squadron made four war cruises with the Corsairs before transitioning to Panthers in November 1952.

Between war cruises in Corsairs, an aborted attempt to transition to Panthers was made in September



1951 when eight F9F-2s were received. However, due to the backlog in production and shortage of spares, the transition was halted and the eight Panthers were reassigned. In November 1952, the squadron once again received the F9F-2. The following month, F9F-5s started arriving and the -2 versions were soon gone.

Weapons training was conducted at NAAS Fallon and NAAS El Centro where VF-63 earned the highest unit gunnery average in the Air Group. The Fighting Redcocks took the F9F-5 to sea aboard the USS Yorktown (CVA-10) for a WESTPAC cruise from 3 August 1953 through 3 March 1954.

After returning to CONUS, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-6

Cougar in April 1954 and in August 1955, F9F-8s replaced the -6s. On 1 March 1956 VF-63 was redesignated VA-63 and then VA-22 on 1 July 1959. The A4D-2 was received on 24 May 1960 and the A4D-2N/A-4C on 6 October 1961. In June 1968 A-4Fs and TA-4Fs replaced the A-4Cs. The squadron's association with Skyhawks ended on 4 February 1971 when A-7Es were received. VA-22 was redesignated VFA-22 on 4 May 1990 and the Corsair IIs were replaced with F/A-18C Hornets on 6 July 1990.

Above, a natural metal VF-63 F9F-5 over Korea with what is believed to be red trim. (USN) Below, VF-63 F9F-5 takes a wave-off from the landing signal officer while operating from the Yorktown in 1953. Tail and nose trim was white. (USN)



Above, the Yorktown's flight deck on 29 November 1953 at the start of flight operations. First up was VF-24 Cougars moving forward down the centerline. VF-63 Panthers, both blue and natural metal, were parked on both sides of the deck flanking the Cougars. Alongside the island is a VC-61 F9F-2P followed by a VF-64 Panther and more VF-63 aircraft. (National Archives) Below, with plane guard hovering in the distance, VF-63 F9F-5 is positioned for a catapult launch from the USS Yorktown (CVA-10) on 29 November 1953. (National Archives)

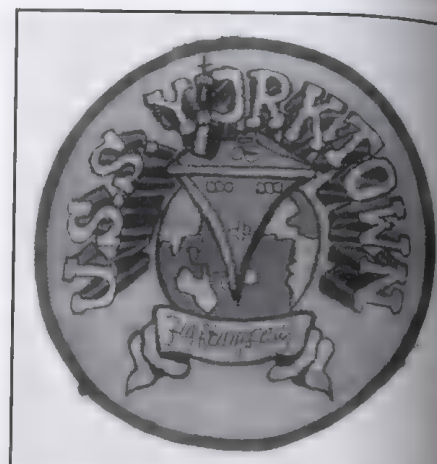


FIGHTER SQUADRON SIXTY - FOUR, VF-64 "FREELANCERS"



VF-64 was originally established as VF-81 on 1 March 1944 at NAS Atlantic City, N. J., flying F6F Hellcats. With F8F Bearcats, the squadron was redesignated VF-13A on 15 November 1946. On 2 August 1948 they became VF-131. While equipped with F4U Corsairs, the squadron became VF-64 on 1 December 1949. The squadron entered the jet age in December 1952 when they received the F9F-5 Panther.

VF-64 deployed its Panthers aboard the USS Yorktown (CVA-10) from 3 August 1953 through 3 March 1954.



Below, VF-64 F9F-5 Panther takes the barrier aboard the USS Yorktown (CVA-10) in 1953. (USN)



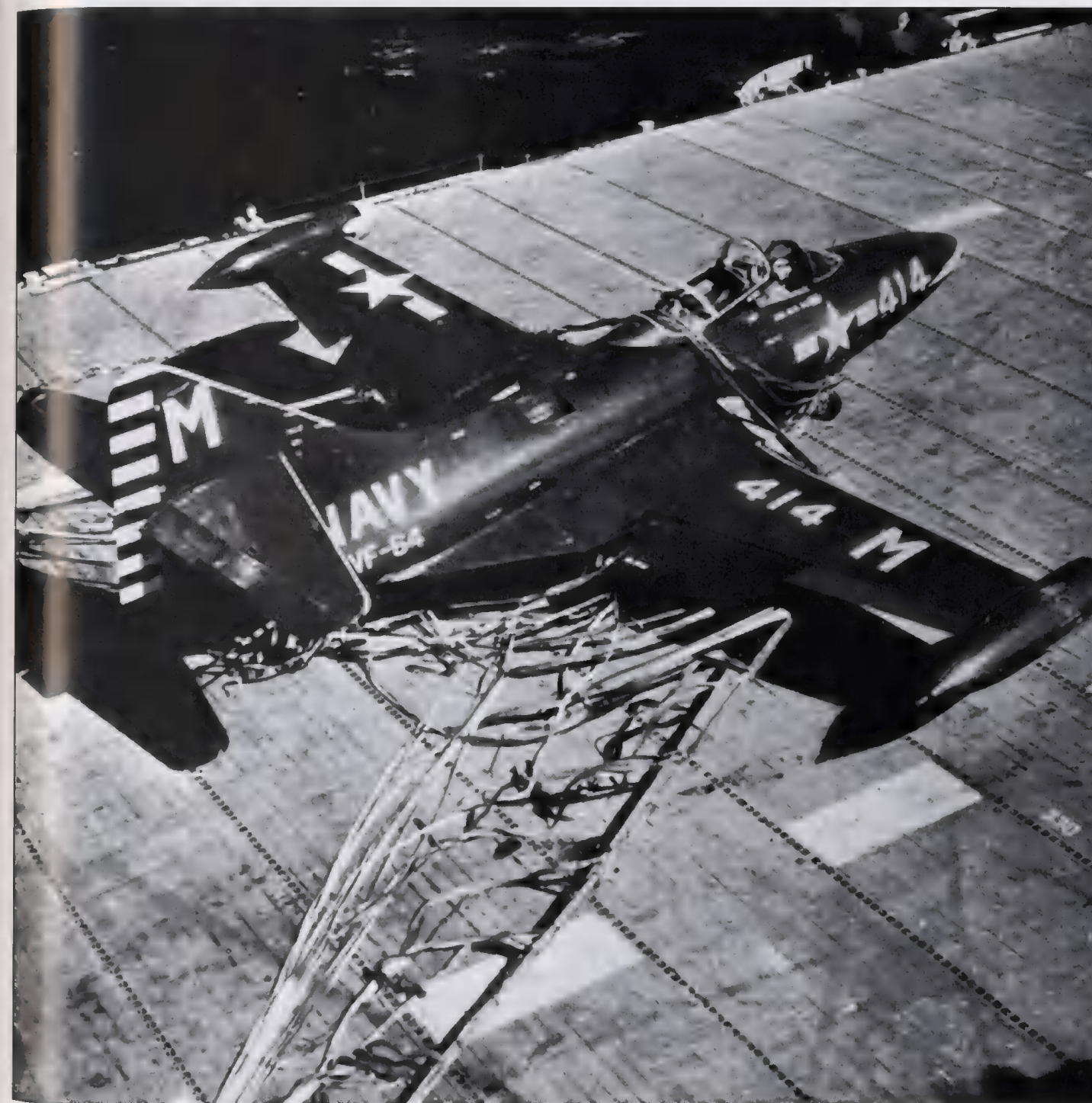
A second Panther cruise was conducted from 3 November 1954 through June 1955. In February, the squadron participated in the evacuation of the Tachen Islands off the coast of China. In March and April the squadron was struck by tragedy. On 9 March, CDR W. E. McLaughlin, squadron CO, was killed during exercises off of Manila. The XO, CDR R. B. Toof assumed command. On 15 April, near Okinawa, LTJG E. C. Walters was killed when his plane hit the water during a landing approach

to the ship.

After their Panther deployment aboard Essex, VF-64 received McDonnell F2H -3 Banshees. These were followed by McDonnell F3H-2 Demons in 1958 and the squadron was redesignated VF-21 on 1 July 1959. At the end of 1961 the squadron moved to NAS Miramar, CA. The F-4B Phantom arrived in September 1962. The squadron went on to fly three more versions of the Phantom: the F-4J, F-4S, and F-4N.

On 4 November 1983, the last Phantom was transferred out and the squadron began transitioning to the Grumman F-14A Tomcat.

Below, VF-64 F9F-5 was saved by the barrier on the USS Essex (CVA-9) in the spring of 1955. Nose and tail markings were white. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY - ONE, VF-71 "FICKLE FINGER SQUADRON"



VGS-18 was established on 15 October 1942 and redesignated VC-18 on 1 March 1943 at NAS Whidbey Island, WA. Initially equipped with twelve FM-1 Wildcats and nine TBM Avengers, thirty-six F6F Hellcats were received in early 1944. During the war, the squadron was credited



with 172 kills in the air and 300 planes destroyed on the ground. They were also involved in the sinking of the Japanese battleships Musashi and Yamato. They were known as the "Fickle Finger Squadron" because of the gesturing devil insignia. They were redesignated VF-18 in the summer of 1944 and moved to San

Above, VF-71 F9F-2 123469 flies over Task Force 77 (CV-31, CV-9, CV-37) off the coast of Korea in August 1952. (National Archives) Below, VF-71 F9F-2 123479 over Diamond Head in June 1952. Nose markings and fin tip are red. (National Archives)



At right, VF-71 F9F-2 flown by ENS George Clare on the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) in 1952. Nose art appears to be a stylized cloud with the legend "BLPFSTK" painted below it. The meaning of the legend is not known. (via Warren Thompson) Below, two VF-71 F9F-2 Panthers, 101/L "Papasan" and 103/L 123460 "Tokyo Moon" 123400, escort a VC-61 F9F-2P photo bird across North Korean skies. (USN)



Diego, CA, where they equipped with F8F-1 Bearcats. In October 1945, the squadron moved to NAS Quonset Point, R.I., and equipped with F9F-2 Panthers in December 1949. In October 1951, the squadron was assigned F9F-5s along with VF-72 and VF-73 to conduct service testing on the type. VF-71 and VF-72 reacquired the F9F-2 in the spring of 1952 in time for a Korean War deployment aboard

the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) from 21 June through 18 December 1952.

A post-war Med cruise was con-

ducted aboard the USS Bennington (CVA-20) from 16 September 1953 through the spring of 1954. After returning to the states, VF-71 transitioned to the F9F-6 Cougar.





Above, VF-71 F9F-2 launches from the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) for another mission over Korea in 1952. (USN) At left, three VF-71 F9F-2 Panthers escort VC-61 F9F-2P photo bird back to the Bon Homme Richard in 1952. (USN) Below, VF-71 F9F-2 123685 with LCDR J. M. HILL painted on the fuselage side. Fin tip and nose trim was red. (via Norm Taylor)



The squadron traded-in their Grumman Cougars for McDonnell F2H-3 Banshees in early 1957. VF-71 was disestablished on 31 March 1959.



Above, VF-71 F9F-2 lands aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard (CVA-31) on 4 November 1952 and a bomb breaks loose and bounces down the deck. (USN via Peter M Bowers) Below, three VF-71 F9F-5s from above in 1954. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY - TWO, VF-72 "HAWKS"



As VBF-18, the Hawks were flying F6F-3/5 Hellcats in 1945. They were redesignated VF-8A on 15 November 1946 and finally VF-72 on 28 July 1948 before being assigned to NAS Quonset Point, R.I. During this period the squadron flew the Grumman F8F-1/2 Bearcat. When VF-72 received its first F9F-2 on 16 March 1951, it was the last fleet squadron still flying the Bearcat.

The squadron carrier qualified aboard the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt and then spent 6-months



of service test flying on the new F9F-5. In December 1951, the squadron was alerted to an upcoming war cruise aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) and received F9F-2s once again. After qualifying aboard the USS Leyte (CV-32), the squadron flew 16 Panthers to San Diego and boarded the Bon Homme Richard. They deployed to Korea from 20 May 1952 through 8 January 1953.

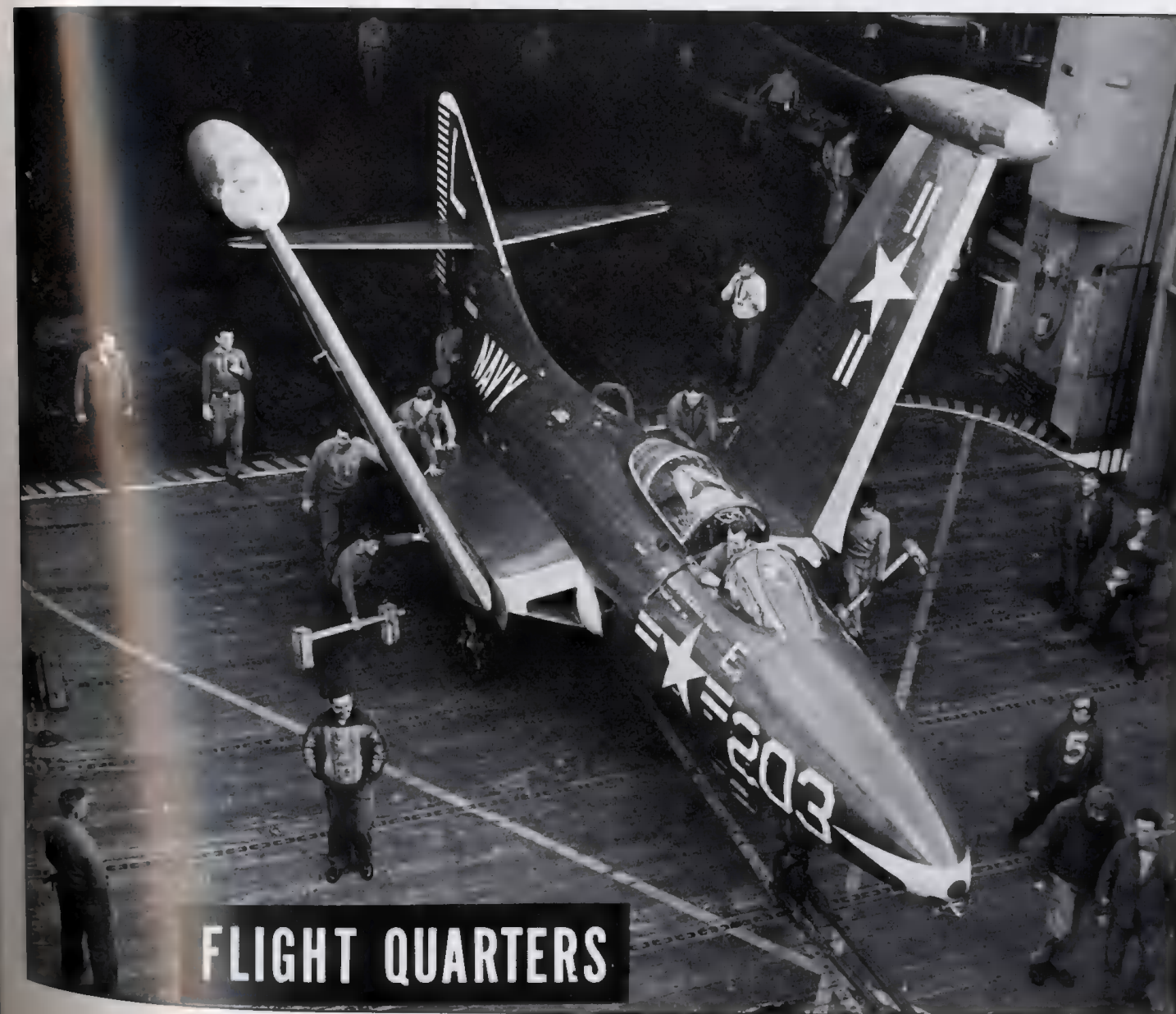
On 3 January 1956, VF-72 was redesignated VA-72 and transitioned to the Douglas A4D-1 Skyhawk. On 12 February 1958 they received A4D-2s which were replaced with A4D-

2Ns in March 1961. In May 1964 the more capable A-4E was acquired, but the squadron reverted to A-4Bs in 1967. In January 1970, the squadron transitioned to the Vought A-7B Corsair II. The A-7E was acquired in September 1977 and the squadron was disestablished on 30 June 1991.

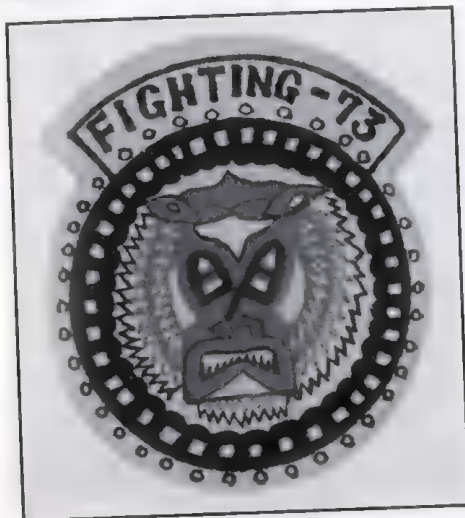
Above, VF-72 F9F-2 123575 on CV-31's elevator on 27 November 1952, while off the coast of Korea. (National Archives) Below, VF-72 F9F-5 Panther aboard the USS Bennington (CVA-20) on 26 January 1954. (National Archives)



Above, VF-72 F9F-2 123484 launches from the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) to strike targets in Korea on 23 June 1952. (USN) Below, VF-72 Panther on the elevator of the USS Bennington (CVA-20) in 1953. Nose and tail markings were white. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY - THREE, VF-73



caused by problems with the engine's fuel nozzles. Because of the problems and the loss of the unit's commanding officer, the unit missed its planned Korean War deployment with its sister squadrons VF-71 and VF-72.

CDR. Richard Lee Wright, CO of VF-73, was killed on 28 March 1952 when his F9F-5 125258 (L/303) caught fire immediately after takeoff and crashed after clearing a row of houses. The cause was believed to be faulty fuel nozzles.

The squadron lost a second commanding officer on 22 July 1952. LCDR John Gregory Dooling died when his F9F-5 125291 crashed in 100 feet of water during a GCA approach in hazy, overcast weather. A second pilot, LT Michael Jordan Kane, also died at the same moment when his F9F-5 125302 hit the water at 10:05 AM. Both bodies and aircraft were recovered and the crash was believed to be due to a mid-air, although it could not be proved.

In December 1952, Grumman F6F-5 Hellcats were temporarily

acquired to replace the F9F-5s until another front line aircraft could be found to equip the squadron. In 1953, VF-73 acquired the F2H-3 all-weather Banshee which remained with the squadron until 1956 when the the FJ-3M Fury was received. The squadron flew the Furies until its disestablishment on 1 March 1958.

Below, one of a series of 15 accidents in Panthers caused by ruptured fuel lines. F9F-5 125269 took off at 10:52AM on 4 November 1951 and caught fire on take-off. The tail burnt off and fell on the roof of Miss Helen Charter's house and the engine buried itself in the ground 200 yards beyond. The rest of the aircraft hit a tree 200 feet from the Greenborough Estate, killing the VF-71 pilot ENS Ralph A. Lennon. The accident report lists the aircraft as a VF-71 Panther, but the author believes it to be a VF-73-assigned aircraft flown by a VF-71 pilot. All three squadrons, VF-71, VF-72 and VF-73, evaluated the F9F-5, but the trademark VF-72 white rudder stripes are missing in this photo and no known VF-71 photos show aircraft with the single white rudder stripe shown here. (National Archives via Larry Webster)



FIGHTER SQUADRON - NINETY ONE, VF-91 "RED LIGHTNINGS"



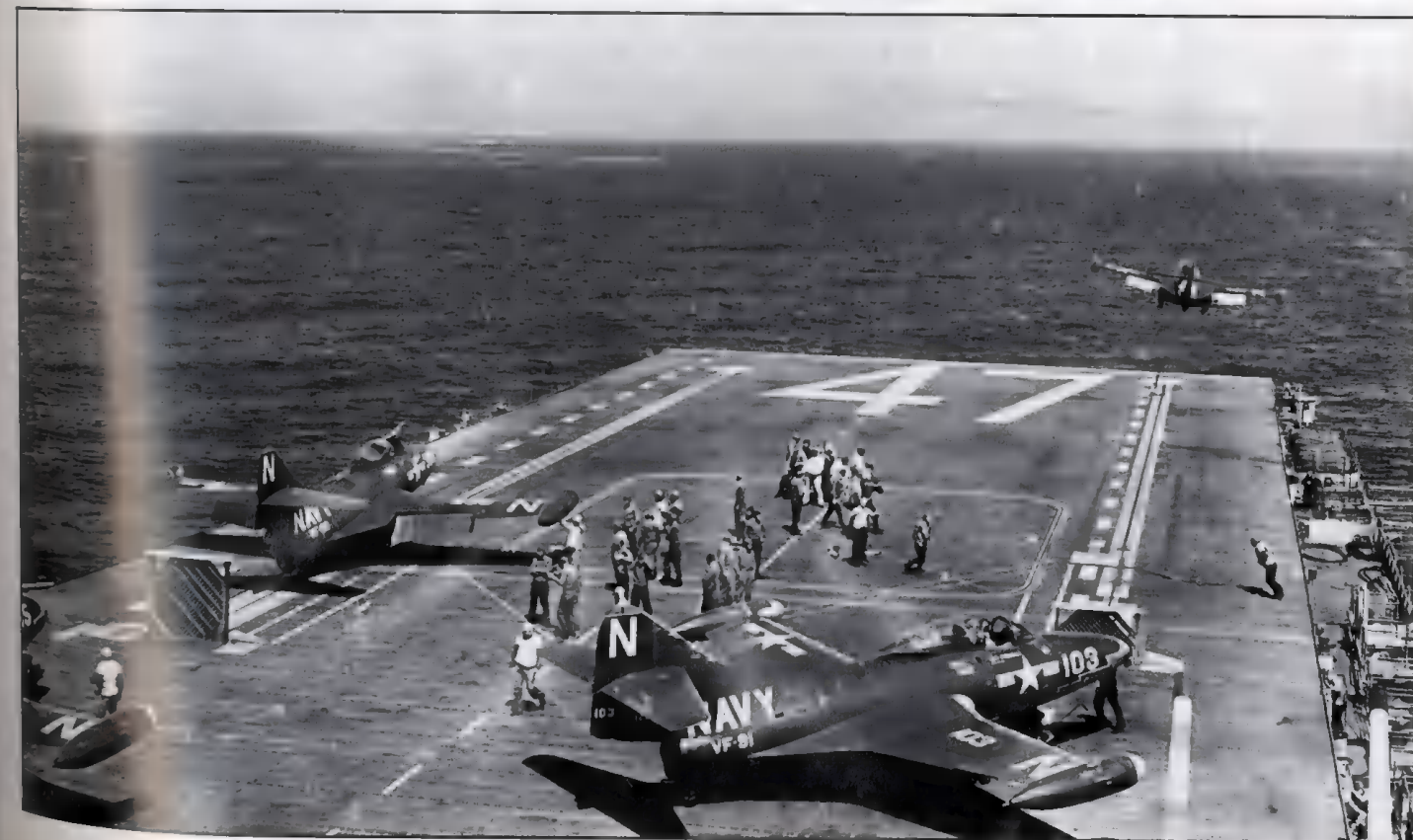
VF-20 was established in 1942 with F6F-3 Hellcats. In August 1944, F6F-5s replaced the F6F-3 Hellcats. Redesignated VF-9A on 15 November 1946, the squadron flew F8F-1 Bearcats and F6F-5P Hellcats from CV-47. In September 1948, VF-9A was redesignated VF-91 and the Grumman F9F-2 Panther was acquired in 1952.

VF-91 took their Panthers aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) for a Korean War deployment from 15



December 1952 through 14 August 1953. CVG-9 and VF-91 launched its first strike on 31 January 1953. The Air Group performed close air support and interdiction missions throughout the spring of 1953. The armistice and cease-fire took place on 27 July 1953, the day the squadron and ship were scheduled to return home. After returning to CONUS, the squadron

Above, VF-91 F9F-2 being tied down during heavy seas off the coast of Korea in 1952 aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47). (USN) Bottom, VF-91 Panther launches from the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) as a VF-93 F9F-2 waits its turn on the port catapult and another VF-91 Panther is moved into launch position. (USN via SDAM)





transitioned to the Grumman F9F-6 Cougar in 1954.

In 1956, the North American FJ-3 Fury replaced the Cougar and the squadron went supersonic in December 1958 with the arrival of Vought F8U-2 Crusaders. On 1 August 1963, VF-91 was redesignated VF-194. As VF-194, the squadron flew the F-8C, F-8E, F-8B, and F-8J. The McDonnell F-4J Phantom II started arriving in March 1976 and was disestablished on 1 March 1978. The

squadron was re-established on 1 December 1986 as a Grumman F-14A Tomcat squadron only to be disestablished once again on 29 April 1988.

Above, two VF-91 F9F-2 Panthers from the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) going to Korea in 1953. (National Archives) Below, VF-91 F9F-2 drops its nose on landing. Note rocket still mounted under the wing. Nose and tail markings were red bordered by white. (USN via SDAM)



FIGHTER SQUADRON NINETY - TWO, VF-92 "SILVER KINGS"



VF-92 was established at NAS Alameda, CA, on 26 March 1952 with F4U-4 Corsairs. The squadron took the name Silver Kings and the motto "Death, Terror, and Vengeance" shortly after standing-up. VF-92 took their Corsairs to war aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) from November 1952 through June 1953. After returning to Alameda the squadron transitioned to the Grumman F9F-2 Panther.

The Silver Kings made one deployment with the F9F-2 from 12 March through 19 November 1954 aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47). After routine WESTPAC operations the carrier and Air Group became involved in an international incident on 22 July 1954 when an Air Cathay airliner was shot down by two Red Chinese La-7 fighters. During the



search and rescue efforts the Air Group was attacked by two more La-7s which were ultimately shot down by the Air Group's Skyraiders and Corsairs.

When the squadron returned from its WESTPAC, they were reassigned to NAS Miramar, CA, where they transitioned to the AD-4 Skyraider. After a Skyraider cruise aboard the USS Shangri-La (CVA-11), the squadron returned to Alameda in June 1956 and acquired the F9F-5 Panther. In October, the Panthers were replaced with F2H-3 Banshees.

The all-weather association with McDonnell products continued when

Above, VF-92 F9F-2 flown by LCDR Dupre clears the barrier and heads toward the parked aircraft on the bow of the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) on 16 April 1954. Note that the aircraft's nose number 210 is repeated on the tail in front of the "N" tail code in the abbreviated form of 10. (USN) Below, VF-92 F9F-2 127194 aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) during port call in 1954. The "N" tail code was repeated on the bottom of the wing. (NMNA)

the F3H-2 Demon was received in May 1959. In June 1962, VF-92 was redesignated VF-54 and received the F-4B Phantom II in July 1963. VF-54 was disestablished in 1975.



FIGHTER SQUADRON NINETY - THREE, VF-93 "BLUE BLAZERS"



VF-93 was established on 26 March 1952. VF-93 was initially equipped with FG-1D Corsairs and F9F-2 Panthers.

VF-93 took their Panthers aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) for a Korean War deployment from 15 December 1952 through 14 August 1953. CVG-9 and VF-93 launched its first strike on 31 January 1953. The Air Group performed close air support and interdiction missions throughout the spring of 1953. The armistice and cease-fire took place on 27 July 1953, the day the squadron and ship were scheduled to return home.

A second Panther cruise was conducted aboard the USS Hornet (CVA-12) from 11 May through 12 December 1954, with the improved F9F-5.

The Grumman F9F-8 Cougar was acquired in January 1955 and on 15 September 1956, VF-93 was redesignated VA-93 and received the A4D-1 Skyhawk. These were replaced with A4D-2 Skyhawks on 25 May 1958 and in turn were replaced with the A4D-2N on 1 September 1960. A return to the A-4B (A4D-2) occurred on 15 October 1963. The A-4E replaced the A-4Bs in September 1966. VA-93 transitioned to the Vought A-7B Corsair II on 20 April 1969. The squadron was flying the A-7E when they were disestablished on 31 August 1986.



Above, VF-93 F9F-2 is hoisted aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) in December 1952. (USN) Bottom, VF-93 F9F-2 launches from the deck of CVA-47 in 1953. Fin tip was blue. (USN via SDAM)



FIGHTER SQUADRON NINETY - FOUR, VF-94 "TOUGH KITTY"



VF-94 was established as Bombing Squadron Ninety-Nine (VB-99) on 1 July 1943 flying the Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless. On 15 October, VB-99 was redesignated VB-20 and received Curtiss SB2C-1C Helldivers. The squadron was redesignated VA-9A on 15 November 1946 and then VA-94 on 12 August 1948. The

Douglas AD-2 Skyraider was flown from 4 October 1948 through 30 November 1949 when VA-94 was disestablished. The squadron was reestablished as VF-94 on 26 March 1952 with the Goodyear FG-1D. These were replaced with the F4U-4 Corsair in August and the squadron deployed to Korea on 15 December 1952.

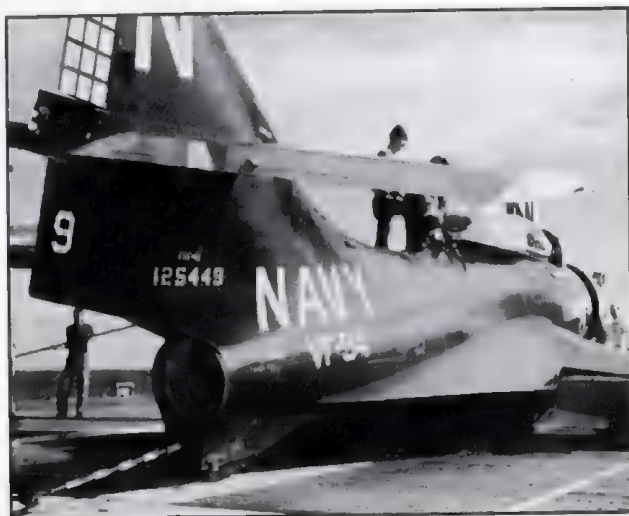
The squadron returned to NAS Alameda, CA, in August 1953 and CDR W. T. Harding took command. The next seven months were spent reforming around and training in the F9F-5 Panther. During this period, the squadron spent six weeks at Fallon, NV, and conducted two carrier qualification deployments.

The squadron departed Alameda on 27 April 1954 for a cross-country to NAS Norfolk, VA. The jets' trip proved to be anything but routine

when severe thunderstorms were encountered enroute. Once safely at Norfolk, the unit made a short familiarization cruise aboard the USS Hornet (CVA-12) prior to departing on the Hornet's World Cruise. Ports of call were: Lisbon, Naples, the Suez Canal to Ceylon, Singapore, Manila. Once at Manila, they operated with the fleet for the next five months. While in the Far East, three stops were made in Japan and one in Hong Kong. During the cruise VF-94 pilots averaged 40 arrested landings and 70 hours of flight time a month. There were several accidents with aircraft

Below, VF-94 F9F-5 125449 lowering wings in preparation for launch from the USS Hornet (CVA-12) on 8 September 1954 off the coast of Formosa. Tail markings were yellow. (USN)





receiving class C and D damage, but no pilots were injured.

The squadron returned to Alameda on 12 December 1954 and was scheduled to transition to the F7U-3 Cutlass, but transitioned to the FJ-3 Fury instead in February 1955. The F9F-8 Cougar arrived in November 1955 and the F9F-8B in April 1956. In June and July 1957, the



FJ-3/3M Fury was re-acquired and in August 1958 the FJ-4 was received. VF-94 became VA-94 on 1 August 1958. On 11 January 1959 the squadron's association with the Skyhawk began with the A4D-2. The squadron would also fly the A4D-2N/A-4C and A-4E before transitioning to the A-7E Corsair II in January 1971. On 5 May 1990, VA-94 became VFA-94 and transitioned to the F/A-

Above left, VF-94 F9F-5 125449's gear collapsed during landing. (USN) Above, VF-94 F9F-5 folds wings as it taxis out of the arresting gear and to the forward parking area. Nose and tail markings were yellow. (USN) Below, natural metal VF-94 F9F-5 parked next to the deck edge elevator while in port. (USN)

18C Hornet on 28 June 1990.



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE HUNDRED TWO, VF-102 ATTACK SQUADRON THIRTY - SIX, VA-36 "ROADRUNNERS"



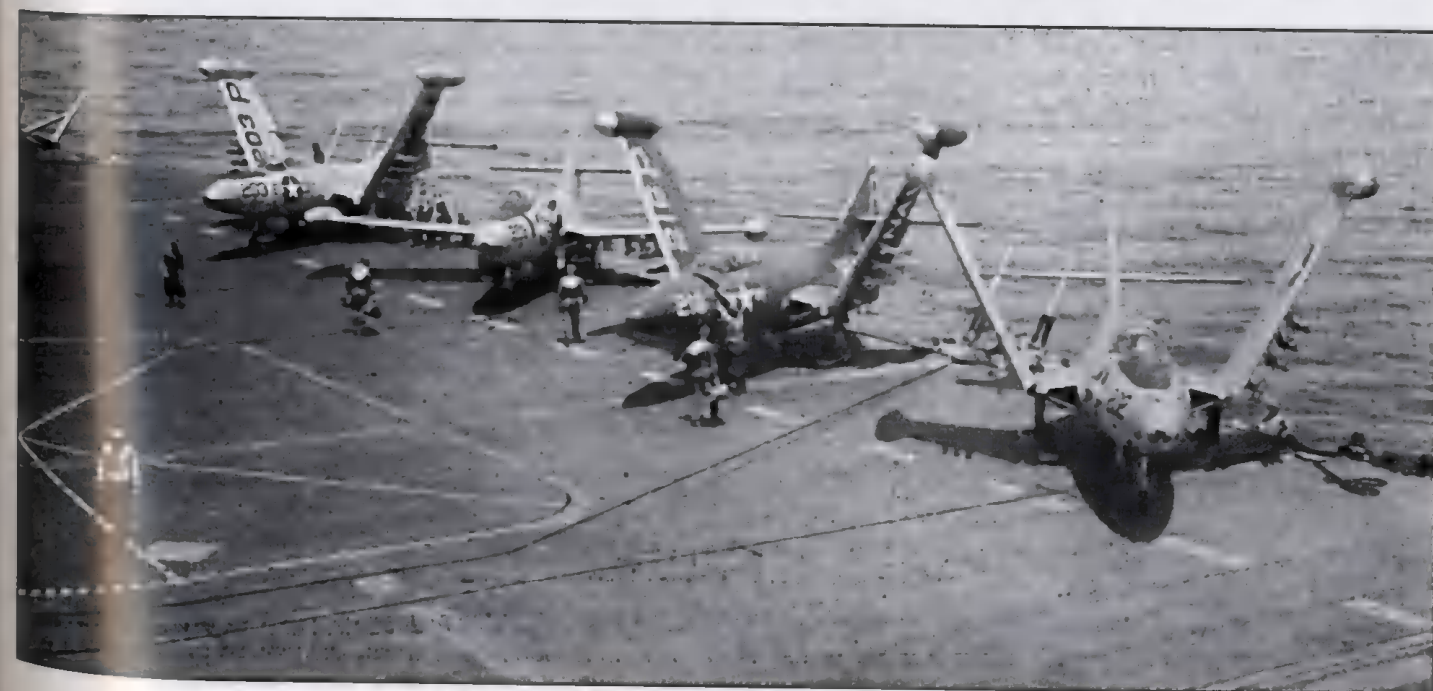
VF-102



VF-102 was established on 1 May 1952 at NAAS Cecil Field, FL. The squadron was initially equipped with FG-1D Corsairs which were replaced with Grumman F9F-5



Above right, VF-102 F9F-5 launches from the USS Bennington (CVA-20) during the carrier's shakedown cruise off the coast of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the spring of 1953. (USN) At right, VF-102 F9F-5 that belonged to the squadron CO in 1954. (via NMNA) Bottom, four VF-102 F9F-5 Panthers prepare for flight operations from the Bennington in early 1953. (USN)





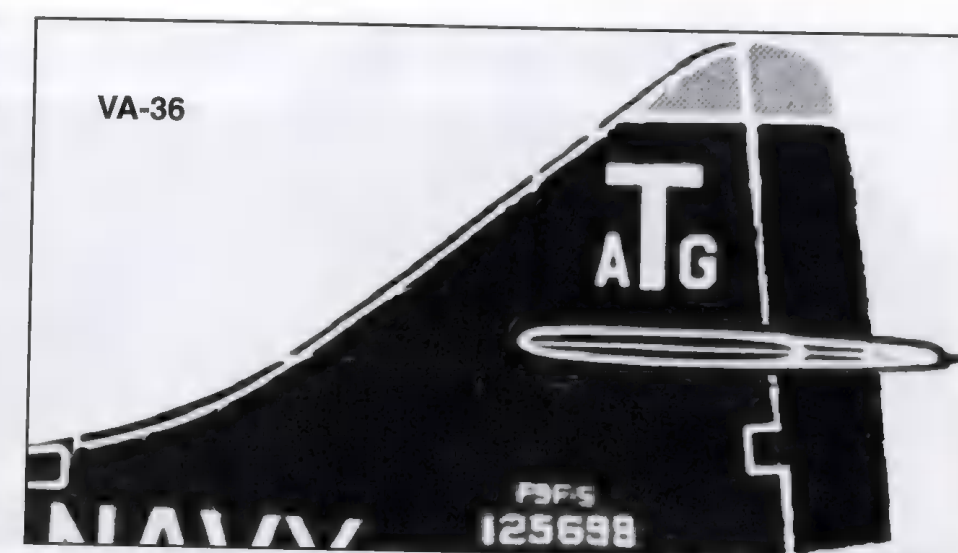
Panthers in October 1952.

After carrier qualifications were completed aboard the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43) in January 1953, the squadron participated in the shake-down cruise of the USS Bennington (CVA-20). The squadron deployed to

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, along with Panthers from VMF-223 and VMF-122, and Skyraiders from VMA-211. In June they participated in Complex Gunnery Exercises and in August were aboard the USS Valley Forge (CVA-45) for a Midshipmen cruise to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

At left, VF-102 F9F-5 Panthers launch from the deck of the USS Tarawa (CVA-40) in March 1954. The fin tip was marked in white. (USN) Below, forward flight deck of the Tarawa in May 1954 with VF-102 Panthers (P tail code) and VF-43 Panthers (F tail code) flanking VC-62 F2H-2P photo Banshees. (USN)

As part of CVG-3 and under the command of LCDR R. A. Clarke, the unit sailed on a world cruise aboard the USS Tarawa (CVA-40) from November 1953 through September 1954. The Tarawa visited fourteen ports in ten different countries and passed through both the Suez and Panama Canals. VF-102 was redesignated VA-36 on 1 July 1955.



VA-36 continued to operate the F9F-5 Panther as part of Air Task Group 201. They deployed aboard the USS Bennington (CVA-20) from 31 October 1955 through 16 April 1956 on a WestPac cruise. The squadron transitioned to the F9F-8/8B Cougar in November 1956.

Some F9F-8Ts were acquired

starting on 14 April 1957 before A4D-2s were received on 11 September 1958. The squadron would go on to fly the A4D-2N/A-4C and the A-4E before being disestablished on 1 August 1970.

Below, VA-36 pilots in September 1955. Top row left to right: LTJG D. R. Fall, LT P. E. Johnson, LTJG D. A. Brown, LTJG A. J. Cooper, LT R. C. Doan, LTJG B. J. Gordon, LT T. W. Luckett, ENS G. V. Smith, LTJG H. L. Brooks, LT H. A. Lackey II, LT A. J. Kermes, LTJG H. W. Newhard, LTJG W. D. Baker, LTJG M. N. Guess, ENS L. Ames (AIO), LTJG R. C. Scott, LT J. D. Blackwood, LTJG J. B. Busey and LTJG M. E. Hill. Bottom row left to right: LT K. T. Weaver, LT P. M. McGucken, CDR L. A. Mendar, Jr, CO, CDR T. T. Coleman, Jr, XO, and LCDR R. G. Altman. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE ELEVEN, VF-111 "SUN DOWNERS"



VF-111 was established as VF-11 on 10 October 1942. They were redesignated VF-11A on 15 November 1946 and finally VF-111 on 15 July 1948.

VF-111 made its first war cruise aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47) from 24 July 1950 through 26 March 1951 as part of CVG-11. On 5 August, with LCDR Tom Amen Commanding, flew the squadrons first launch in Korea against airfields at Mokpo, Kwangju and Kunsan.

On 9 November 1950, LCDR Tom Amen became the first Navy pilot to down a MiG-15. At the time, he was flying top-cover for the ship's Corsair and Skyraider squadrons who were attacking the Sinuiji rail and highway bridges across the Yalu River. The attack force was engaged by at least six of the sleek MiG-15s. The fight started at 18,000 feet and



was over quickly with Amen pulling a tight loop which brought his guns to bear on the fleeing MiG. Amen later said, "I was coming head-on at one of them and he didn't even try to get in a shot. When I got on his tail he tried to evade but he wasn't very sharp".

On 15 October 1951, with ATG-1 aboard, CV-45 sailed for Korea once more. ATG-1 was made up of VF-111 under the command of LCDR Frank Welch with F9F-2s, VF-52 also with F9F-2s, VF-653 with F4U-4s, and VF-194 with AD-2/3 Skyraiders. The Happy Valley did its combat work-up in the waters off Hawaii where Frank Welch died during a carrier landing accident.

LCDR John W. Ramsey took command and the ship proceeded to Korea once again. The Air Group's first strikes occurred on 11 December when the air group struck rail lines

and bridges. On New Year Day, VF-111 struck warehouses west of Wonsan and on 15 January 1952 bagged a tank on a strike near Yonghung. During the squadron's first period on-line, 10 VF-111 Panthers were damaged. On 3 January, ENS Earl R. Reimers ditched his fuel-starved Panther alongside the minesweeper USS Endicott (DMS-35) and was quickly recovered. On 5 February, while

Above, VF-111 CO LCDR Tom Amen is helped out of his aircraft by his plane captain after scoring the Navy's first jet-to-jet kill of the Korean War when he bagged a MiG-15 on 9 November 1950. The kill was accomplished in one of VF-112's Panthers. (USN) Below, VF-111 Panther piloted by LT R. R. Yount lands aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47) on 11 August 1950. (National Archives)



attacking lines of communication, a VF-111 Panther was hit by flak and subsequently made an emergency gear-up landing at K-18 in Korea. A second Panther landed gear-up at K-18 on 8 February after it too was hit by flak. Also that same day, a battle-damaged VF-111 Panther made a barricade landing on the Valley Forge. Another pilot, LT W. P. Johnson, was forced to ditch after a flame-out in the landing pattern on 19 February. On 16 March, LTJG J. C. McCoy made 7 rail line cuts with eight bombs. The squadron returned to San Diego on 3 July 1952.

The squadron's third war cruise was aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) as part of ATG-1 from 30 March through 28 November 1953.

The F9F-6 Cougar was acquired in 1954 and the F9F-8 in 1956. In 1958, the FJ-3M Fury replaced the squadron's Cougars. VF-111 was disestablished on 19 January 1959.

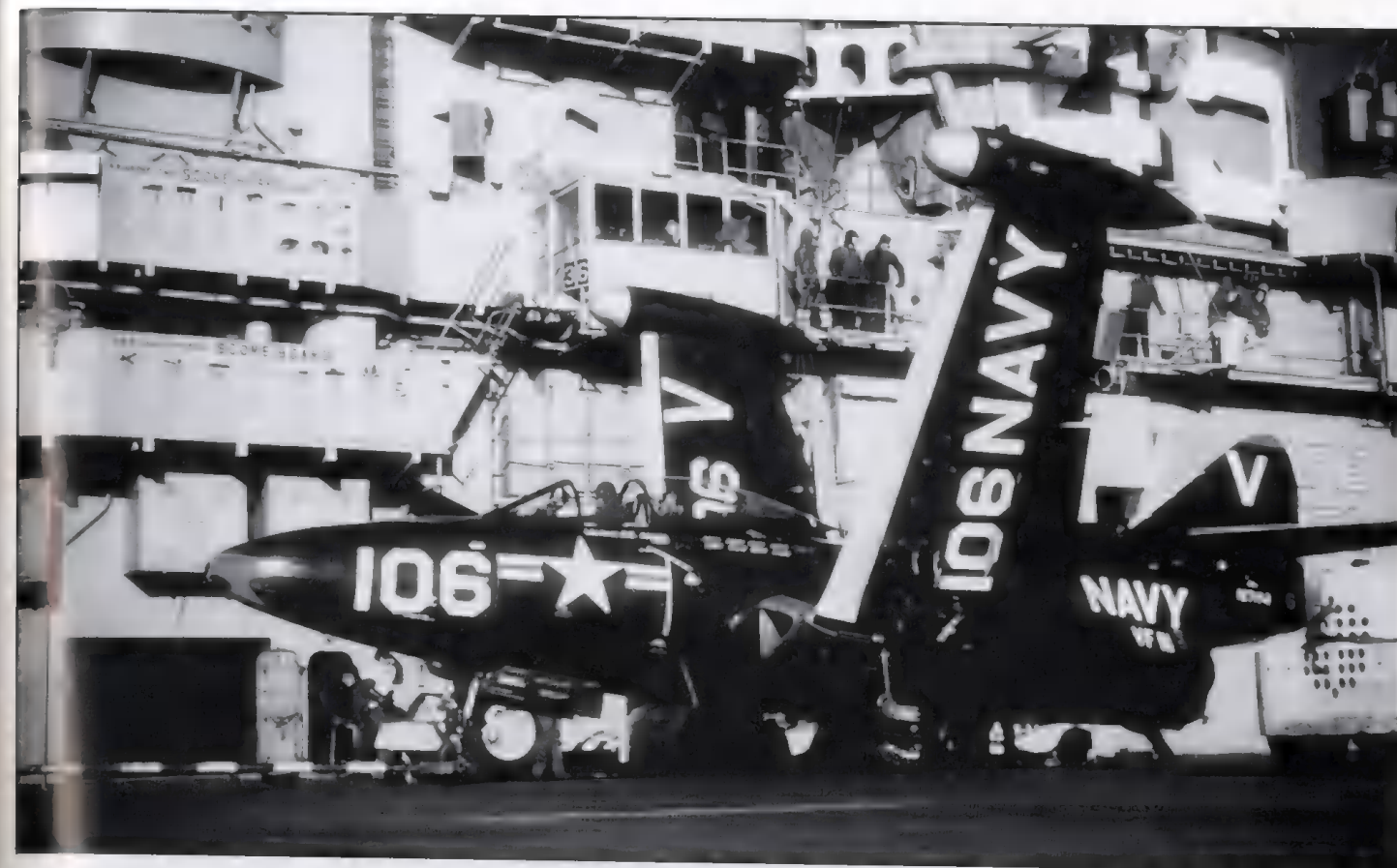


Above, members of FASRON 11 repair tail of VF-111 F9F-2 127167 at K-18 Korea on 18 February 1952. (National Archives) Below, seven blue and three natural metal VF-111 F9F-2 Panthers were tied down during a port call and rest and recuperation visit to Japan. (USN via Max Bell)





Above, natural metal VF-111 Panther, off the coast of Korea on 12 June 1953, was operating from the USS Boxer (CVA-21). (National Archives) At left, VF-111 natural metal F9F-5 heads for Korea with three 250-pound bombs under each wing. (via Craig Kaston) Below, three VF-111 Panthers are seen on 31 March 1952 aboard the USS Philippine Sea with the traditional penalty for landing on the wrong carrier, a custom paint job. There are over 80 mission marks painted on the side of 127191 in the foreground and 127173 at right. (National Archives)

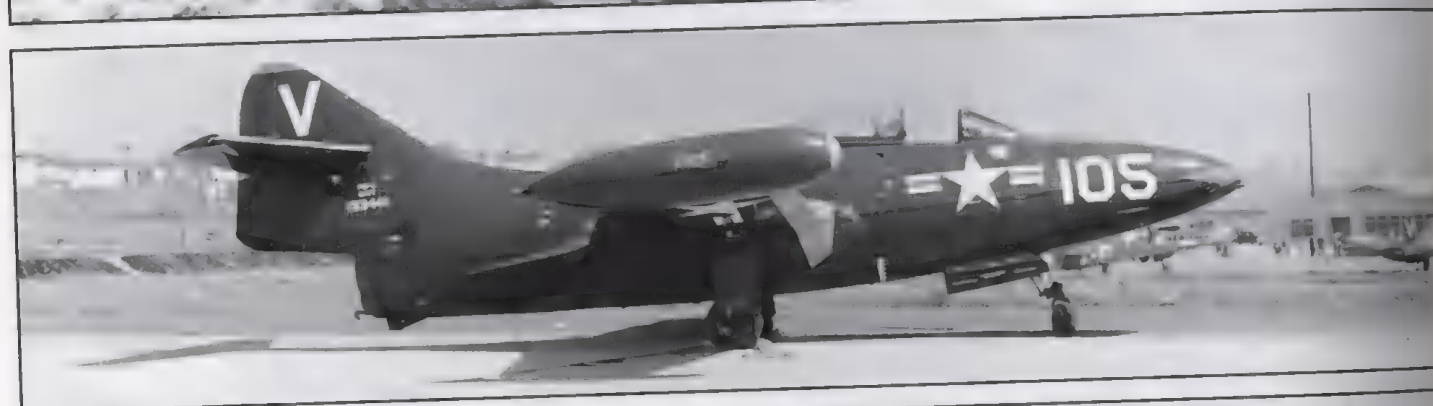


Above, VF-111 F9F-2 127174 aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) in 1952 while assigned to ATG-1. (Bob Balser via Warren Thompson) Below, VF-111 F9F-2 in flight off the coast of Korea in 1951. Nose and tail markings were red. (USN)





Above, VF-111 F9F-2 lands at a Korean air strip during the war. (via Paul Freiler) At left, LTJG Robert A. Guyer releases two bombs on 23 May 1952. Aircraft carries over 100 mission marks on the fuselage sides. (USN) Below, VF-111 F9F-2 123441, date unknown. (Peter M. Bowers collection) Bottom, VF-111 F9F-5s aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) off the coast of Korea on 21 May 1953. 125494 is in the foreground. (National Archives)



Above, VF-111 F9F-5 Panther being re-spotted on carrier. (via Max Bell) Below, five VF-111 F9F-5s in flight. (via Fred Roos)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE TWELVE, VF-112 "CUSTODE PACIS ARMIS"



VF-112 was originally established on 9 April 1945 as VBF-11. The squadron was assigned the Grumman F6F Hellcat and was transferred to NAS Kahului, Maui, T. H., in February 1946. The squadron was redesignated VF-12 in November 1946 and was reassigned to NAS San Diego, CA, on 31 January 1947 where they flew the F8F Bearcat. On 15 July 1948, VF-12 was redesignated VF-112. The squadron started its transition to the Grumman F9F-2

Panther on 11 January 1950 and on 13 February the last F8F-2 Bearcat departed. In less than six months, while under the command of CDR R. Weymouth, the squadron was on its way to war aboard the USS Philippine Sea.

The squadron's first war cruise with the Panther was from 24 July 1950 through 26 March 1951 aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47). With the rush to war due to the invasion of Korea, VF-112 had not been fully trained on the F9F-2 necessitating extensive CarQuals off the coast of Hawaii prior to sailing to Korea. The squadron's first combat flights occurred on 5 August when two four-plane flights attacked targets in the Mokpo-Kwangju area. On 20 August the squadron lost ENS C. L. Smith when he was apparently hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed near Sariwon. That same day, CDR Ralph Weymouth, the squadron CO, assumed command of CAG-11 as CDR Vogel had been killed on the

previous day.

On 17 September 1950, ENS Edward D. Jackson Jr. flew through some high-tension cables across the Hann River, resulting in extensive damage to the aircraft and facial lacerations and partial blindness to Jackson. His wingman, ENS Dayl Crow, stayed with him and guided him to the ship and into the groove, where he caught the number 5 wire. During November, the new squadron CO, LCDR John L. Butts, and ENS R. E. Aslund damaged one MiG-15 in combat.

The squadron's second war cruise was also aboard the USS Philippine Sea. The deployment was from 31 December 1951 through 9 August 1952 and VF-112 was the

Below, flight of four VF-112 F9F-2s on 1 June 1950 over San Diego, CA, with 123439 in the foreground. Nose and tail markings were white. (USN)



only jet fighter squadron assigned to CV-47. The only other jets deployed were the photo Banshees of VC-61. Air Group Eleven's primary mission on this cruise was that of interdiction. They concentrated on supply lines, bridges, tunnels, rail lines, marshalling yards, fuel dumps, ammunition dumps, and warehouses.

On 23 June 1952, Task Force 77 launched 35 Skyraiders and 35 Panthers on a strike against the hydroelectric plants at Suiho. VF-112, under the command of CDR James V. Rowney, was armed with two 250 pound bombs and a full load of 20mm on each of its aircraft. The Panthers

went in first, using their bombs for flak suppression, and then finished the mission as top cover.

The squadron boarded the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33) with F9F-5s for a third war cruise on 1 July 1953, however the truce was signed prior to arriving on station and the squadron operated in a peacekeeping role for the rest of the cruise. The squadron returned to San Diego on 18 January 1954.

The squadron transitioned to the F9F-6 Cougar in September 1953, the F9F-8 in July 1955 and the F9F-8B in April 1956. In April 1957, the

Above, VF-112 F9F-2 tensioned on the Philippine Sea's port catapult off the Korean coast on 13 August 1950, ready for another mission. (USN) Below, VF-112 F9F-2 123439 passes over NAS North Island, CA, on 1 June 1950. Note location of the upper wing codes. (USN via Fred Roos)

F3H-2M Demon was acquired. In March 1959 the squadron was redesignated VA-112 and received the A4D-2 Skyhawk. This was followed by the A4D-2N on 26 March 1961, and VA-112 was disestablished on 10 October 1969.





Above, cat Officer gives the launch signal to a VF-112 F9F-2 during the squadron's second Panther deployment aboard the Philippine Sea in 1952. (USN)
At left, flyable civilian Panther 123072 in VF-112 markings in August 1987. (via Craig Kaston) Bottom, view of the bow over the folded wings of VF-112 F9F-2 127207 where the Air Wing's Corsair's are positioned with engines running. Air Group prop planes were commonly used to berth carriers in tight harbors. (USN)



Below, VF-112 F9F-5s flank VA-115 AD-4Ws on the deck of the USS Kearsarge in 1953. Nose and tip tank markings were white spirals. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE THIRTEEN, VF-113 "STINGERS"



VF-113 was established on 15 July 1948 with the F8F-1 Bearcat at NAS North Island, CA. The squadron switched to the F8F-2 on 28 March 1949 and acquired F4U-4B Corsairs on 9 March 1950. The Stingers made two combat cruises aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) with their Corsairs before receiving F9F-5s in October 1952.

The first Panther deployment was from 1 July 1953 through 18 January 1954 aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33).



The second Panther deployment was with F9F-2s and was also aboard the USS Kearsarge. The deployment was from 7 October 1954 through 12 May 1955. During this cruise the squadron and CVG-11 were on station and available for air support during the evacuation of personnel from the Tachen Islands after the bombardment by the People's Republic of China.

In May 1955, the squadron traded-in their Panthers for F9F-8 Cougars and in March 1956 they

were redesignated VA-113. As VA-113 the squadron would transition to the Grumman F9F-8B, Douglas A4D-1, A4D-2, A4D-2N/A-4C, A-4F, A-7B, and A-7E. On 25 March 1983, the Stingers became VFA-113 and transitioned to the F/A-18 Hornet.

Above, catapult action aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33) in 1953 with VF-113 F9F in the foreground. (USN)
Below, four VF-113 F9F-5s over the USS Kearsarge in 1953. Fin tips and nose spirals were blue. (USN)

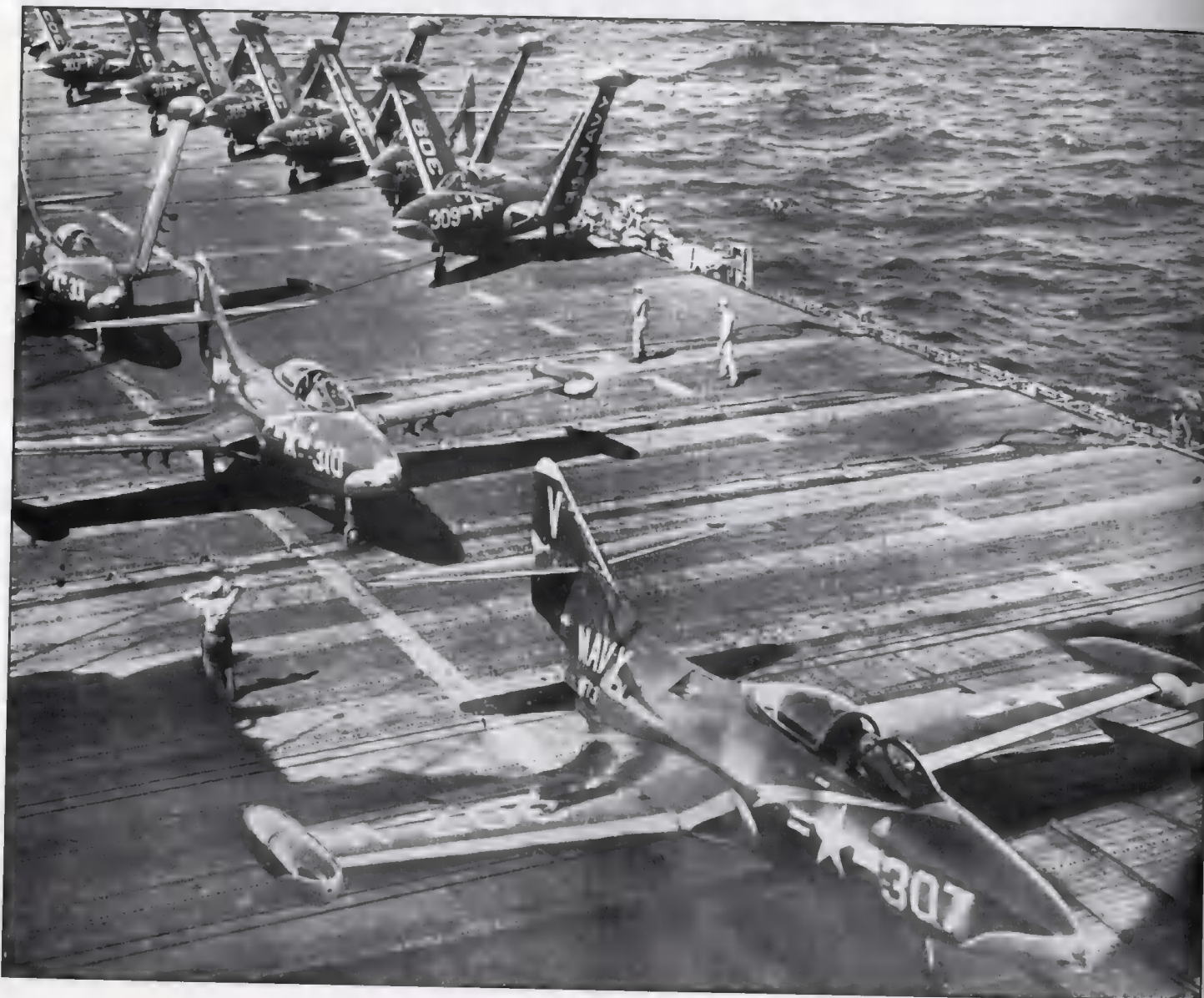


Above, VA-113 F9F-5 on the deck edge elevator of the Kearsarge in February 1953 with blue nose markings and fin tip. (USN)
Below, VF-113 F9F-5 CAG bird on the Kearsarge in February 1953. Nose spirals were blue bordered in white. (USN)





Above, VF-113 F9F-5 at NAS North Island. (via Kaston) Below, VF-113 F9F-2 Panthers aboard the USS Kearsarge in 1955. Nose, fin tip, tip tank and fuselage flash were blue bordered by white. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FOURTEEN, VF-114 "EXECUTIONERS"



VF-114 was originally established as Bombing Squadron Five Bravo (VB-5B) on 2 July 1934 at NAS Norfolk, VA. In July 1937, the squadron was redesignated VB-2. As VB-2, the squadron took the Douglas SBD Dauntless to war. The squadron was disestablished on 1 July 1942 and reestablished as VB-11 on 10 October 1942 with the Curtiss SB2C Helldiver. On 15 November 1945 the squadron was redesignated VA-11A and then VA-114 on 1 July 1948. On 15 February 1950, VA-114 became VF-114. VF-114 received Chance Vought F4U Corsairs and deployed to Korea aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CV-47).

Upon return from Korea, VF-114



transitioned to the Grumman F9F-5 Panther in October 1952. The squadron's first Panther deployment was from 1 July 1953 through 18 January 1954 aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33).

VF-114 took its F9F-5 Panthers aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33) for a second time from 7 October 1954 through 12 May 1955. During this cruise the squadron and CVG-11 were on station and available for air support during the evacuation of per-

Above, barrier engagement by a VF-114 F9F-5 aboard the USS Kearsarge. (USN) Below, VF-114 F9F-5 catches a wire aboard Kearsarge in 1954. (USN)

sonnel from the Tachen Islands after the bombardment by the People's Republic of China.

The McDonnell F2H-3 Banshee replaced the Grumman F9F-5





Panthers in late 1955. In early 1957, VF-114 received the McDonnell F3H-2N Demon which was replaced with the McDonnell F4H-1 Phantom in 1961. The squadron went on to fly F-4B and F-4J Phantoms before transitioning to the Grumman F-14A

Tomcat in 1976. After operating seventeen years with the Tomcat, the squadron was disestablished on 30 April 1993.

Above, two VF-114 F9F-5s are positioned for launch in 1954 aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33). Nose, fuselage, tip tank and fin tip trim was orange bordered by white. (USN) Below, tailless VF-114 Panther undergoes engine test on the Kearsarge's flight deck in 1954. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE TWENTY - THREE, VF-123 "BLUE RACERS"



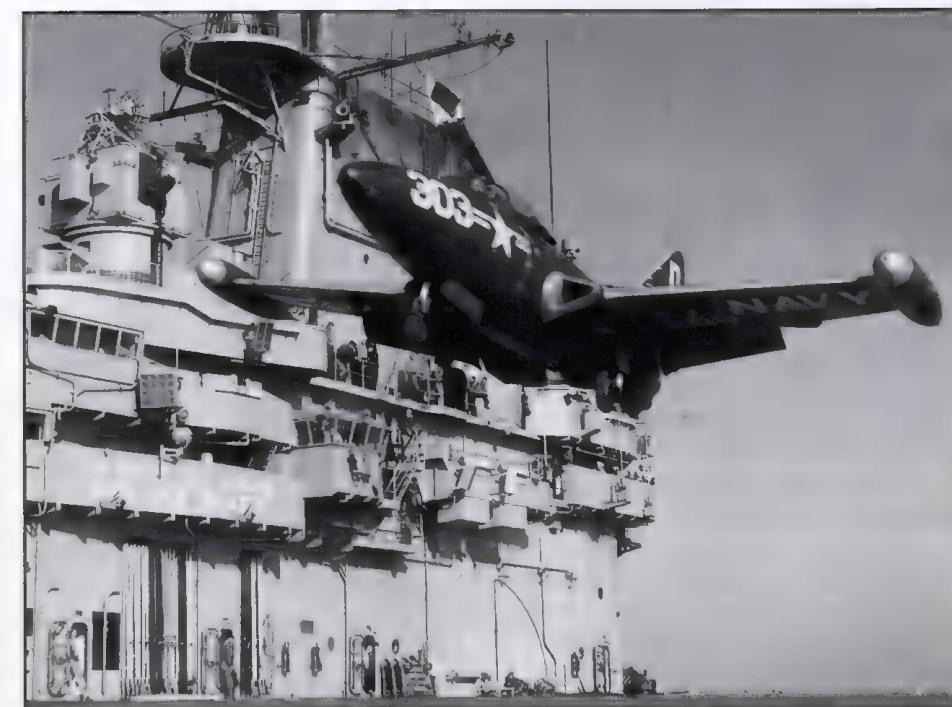
VF-123 was originally established on 9 December 1949 at NAS Oakland, CA, as VF-871. The "Conquistadores" flew the F4U-4 Corsair when called to active duty in July 1950 in response to the outbreak of the Korean War. The squadron fielded their Corsairs in the Korean theatre aboard the USS Princeton (CV-47) and the USS Essex (CV-9).

On 4 February 1953, VF-871 was redesignated VF-123 and renamed the "Blue Racers". The squadron transitioned to the Grumman F9F-2 Panther, completing transition training on 28 June. The squadron was honored with its first AIRPAC Safety Award in July and continued training for its first WESTPAC cruise with the Panther.

On 1 December 1953, as part of ATG-2, VF-123 boarded the USS Essex (CV-9) for a post-Korean War cruise that lasted until 12 July 1954. Upon returning to CONUS, the unit received its second AIRPAC Safety Award.

A second WESTPAC cruise was made aboard the USS Philippine Sea (CVA-47) from 1 April 1955 through 23 November 1955. On this cruise, each pilot averaged over 70 carrier landings and the squadron received the rating of Excellent on both the ORI and Admin inspections.

Upon return from this cruise, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-8 Cougar. The F3H-2 Demon replaced



the Cougars in March 1958. On 12 April the squadron was redesignated VF-53. On 20 June 1962 the unit became VF-143 and was equipped with the F-4 Phantom, which was used through August 1974. The squadron then transitioned to the Grumman F-14A Tomcat.

Above, F9F-2 flies past the island of the USS Oriskany (CVA-34) on 27 July 1953 during carqual. (USN) Below, F9F-2 lands aboard CVA-47 on 4 July 1955. (USN) Bottom, F9F-2 launches from CVA-47 in 1945. Rudder and tip tank stripe was yellow with blue stars. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE TWO FOUR, VF-124 "STING-A-REE/MOONLIGHTERS"

Reserve squadron VF-874 was called to active duty on 20 July 1950 in response to the Korean War. The squadron was equipped with Chance Vought F4U-4 Corsairs and conducted two carrier deployments with the F4U. The unit flew their Corsairs from the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) and the USS Oriskany (CV-34).

VF-874 was redesignated VF-124 on 4 February 1953 and started receiving Grumman F9F-2 Panthers in May 1953. During 1954, VF-124 deployed their F9F-2 Panthers aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21).

VF-124 received six Project Cutlass F7U-3 Cutlasses in late 1954 as the nucleus of the West Coast's first operational fleet Cutlass

squadron. At the high point, VF-124 had twenty-two F7U-3s. The F3H-2N Demon replaced the Cutlass in May 1956 and VF-124 was disestablished on 10 April 1958.

Below, two VF-124 F9F-2s in flight during operations off the Philippines in 1954. Nose markings and fin tip are believed to be orange. (USN) Bottom, VF-124 F9F-2 landing aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) in 1954. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FOURTY - FOUR, VF-144 "BITTERBIRDS"



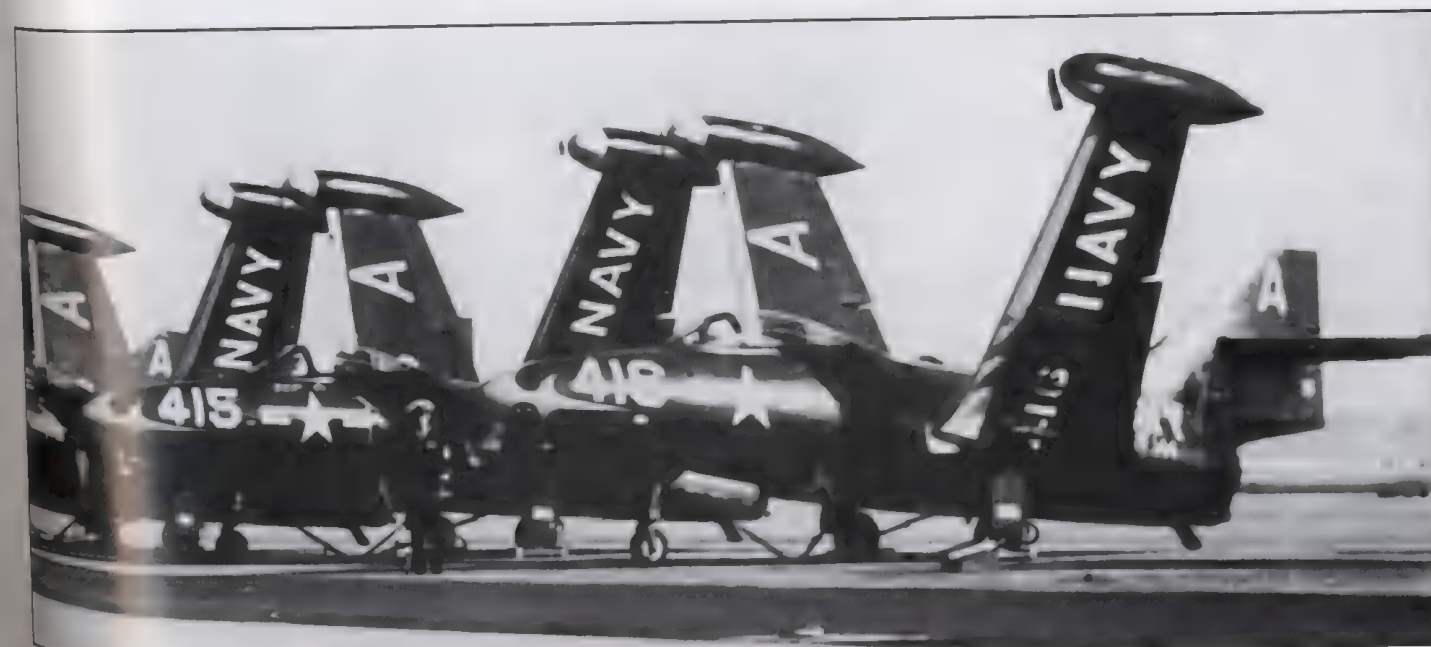
VF-144 was originally reserve squadron VF-884 from NAS Olathe, KS. The BitterBirds were activated as a result of the Korean War and deployed aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) with Air Group 101, the first all-reserve Air Group in Korea. For their second war deployment, VF-884 went aboard the USS Kearsarge and during the cruise were redesignated VF-144.

After returning from the Kearsarge cruise, they converted from F4U Corsairs to F9F-5 Panthers. After training at NAS Miramar and NAF El Centro, a transfer to the East Coast and a Mediterranean cruise aboard the USS Randolph (CVA-15) followed. The cruise lasted from 3 February through 6 August 1954.

The squadron deployed again aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) from June 1955 through 3 February 1956.

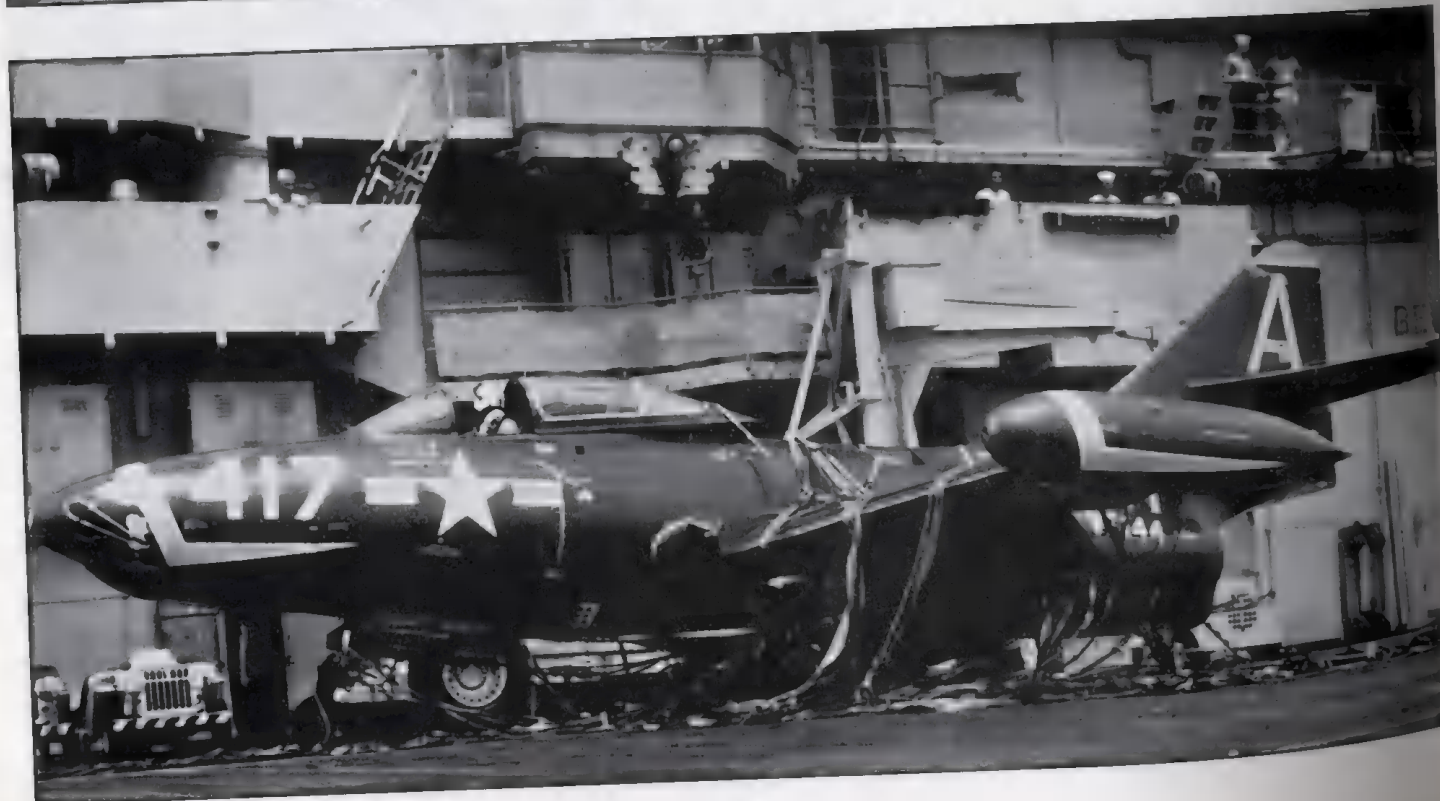
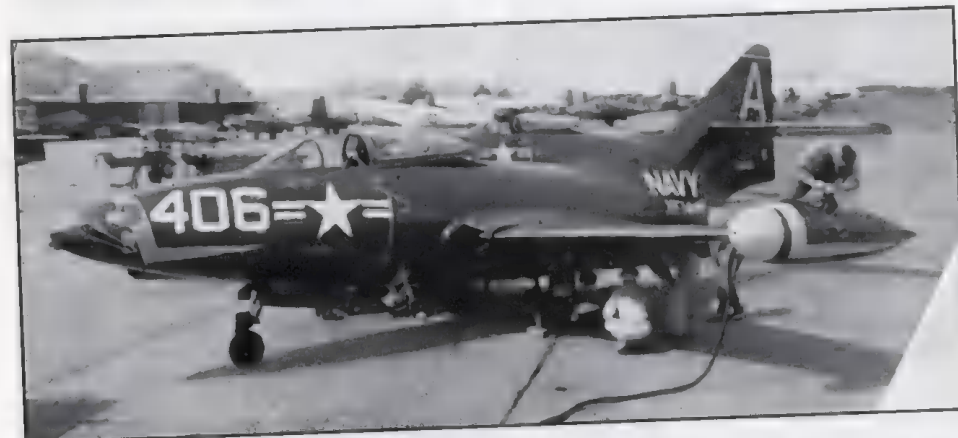
In April 1956 the Cougar replaced the Panther and in 1958 the F9F-8Bs

Above and below, VF-144 F9F-5s landing on the USS Randolph. Fin tip and nose flash were yellow. (USN) Bottom, squadron flightline in markings used on the Randolph's 1954 deployment to the MED. (USN)





Above, VF-144 F9F-5 126240 over Miramar with yellow nose flashes and yellow fin tip. (via Bob Lawson) Below, 406/A with Bitterbird nose markings undergoing maintenance at NAS Miramar, CA, prior to the squadron's Boxer deployment. (USN) Bottom, VF-144 Panther takes the barrier aboard the Boxer in 1955. (USN) At right, LTJG J. R. Koesy after making the 73,000th landing on Boxer on 22 September 1955. (USN)



Above left, natural metal VF-144 F9F-5 parked by the Boxer's island. (USN) Above, VF-144 Panthers take on fuel prior to a mission. (USN) Bottom, VF-144 F9F-5 Panthers above the Task Force in 1955. (USN)

were replaced with Douglas AD-5/6/7 Skyraiders. On 23 February 1959 VF-144 was redesignated VA-52. In 1967, the squadron's



Skyraiders gave way to Grumman A-6A Intruders. The squadron was disestablished on 31 March 1995.



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE NINETY - ONE, VF-191 "SATAN'S KITTENS"



VF-191 was originally established as VF-19 at NAAS Los Alamitos, CA, on 15 August 1943. VF-19 flew Hellcats during World War Two. VF-19 became the first squadron to receive the new F8F-1 Bearcats when squadron pilots reported to Grumman in February 1945 to pick them up. On 15 November 1946, the squadron was redesignated VF-19A and then VF-191 on 24 August 1948. In 1949, the squadron transitioned to Grumman F9F-2B Panthers.

After the Korean War started, the Navy's Flight Demonstration Team (Blue Angels) was disbanded and skipper and six pilots and thirty-three

enlisted men were transferred to VF-191 where they provided the very experienced nucleus for the 'Kittens' first war cruise. The six pilots were LT A. R. Hawkins, LT Jake H. Robcke, LT Ralph Hanks, LTJG George W. Hoskins, LTJG E. F. Roth, and LTJG F. J. Murphy. The "Blues" leader, LCDR Johnny Magda, took over command of 191 until his death over Tanchon in March 1951. The squadron lost two more pilots during their first war cruise.

The first F9F Panther cruise was aboard the USS Princeton (CV-37) from 5 December 1950 through 29 May 1951. The second was also

aboard the USS Princeton from 4 April through 8 October 1952. VF-191 was assigned to CVG-19 for both of these deployments.

After returning to CONUS, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-6

Cougar. In 1956, the FJ-3 Fury arrived and in October 1957, the F11F-1 Tigers. In June 1960, the squadron received the F8U-1 Crusader and transitioned to the F-4J Phantom II in March 1976. The squadron was disestablished on 1 March 1978.

VF-191 F9F-2 Panther over San Francisco Bay during the squadron's workup for their first Korean War deployment. (USN via SDAM)

Below, three VF-192 Panthers near the Oakland Bay bridge on 22 August 1950. This was during the squadron's work-up for its Korean War cruise. The pilots were the recently disbanded Blue Angels. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE NINETY - ONE, VF-191 "SATAN'S KITTENS"



Above, VF-191 F9F-2 123600 in flight over Korea. (USN) At left, going vertical! Two VF-191 F9F-2s escort a VC-61 photo Panther in a vertical climb. (USN) Below, two VF-191 F9F-2s vent fuel upon returning from a combat mission over Korea. (USN) Bottom, VF-191 F9F-2 Panther launches from the USS Princeton (CV-37) for a strike over Korea on 5 December 1950. (National Archives)



FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE NINETY - TWO, VF-192 "GOLDEN DRAGONS"



VF-192 started out as VF-153 on 26 March 1945 with F6F-3/5 Hellcats. VF-153 was redesignated VF-15A on 15 November 1946 and received F8F-1 Bearcats in November 1947. They became VF-151 on 15 July 1948 and upgraded to F8F-2s in July 1949. VF-151 became VF-192 on 15 February 1950 and converted to F4U-4 Corsairs in July 1950. After a

Korean War cruise was conducted with the Corsairs, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-2 Panther on 14 July 1951. On 9 October, VF-192's Panthers were transferred to VF-191 and the squadron re-acquired F4U-4s again for its second war cruise. After returning to CONUS the squadron re-acquired F9F-2 Panthers on 3 December 1952 and then F9F-5s in

Above, VF-192 pilots pose with one of their aircraft after returning to Oriskany after their temporary duty with the 5th Air Force. They are wearing US Army caps acquired during a tour of the front lines. (USN) Below, ten VF-192 F9F-5s on the forward deck of CVA-34 at Sasebo, Japan, on 4 November 1953. Note the natural metal VF-192 bird on the right. (National Archives)



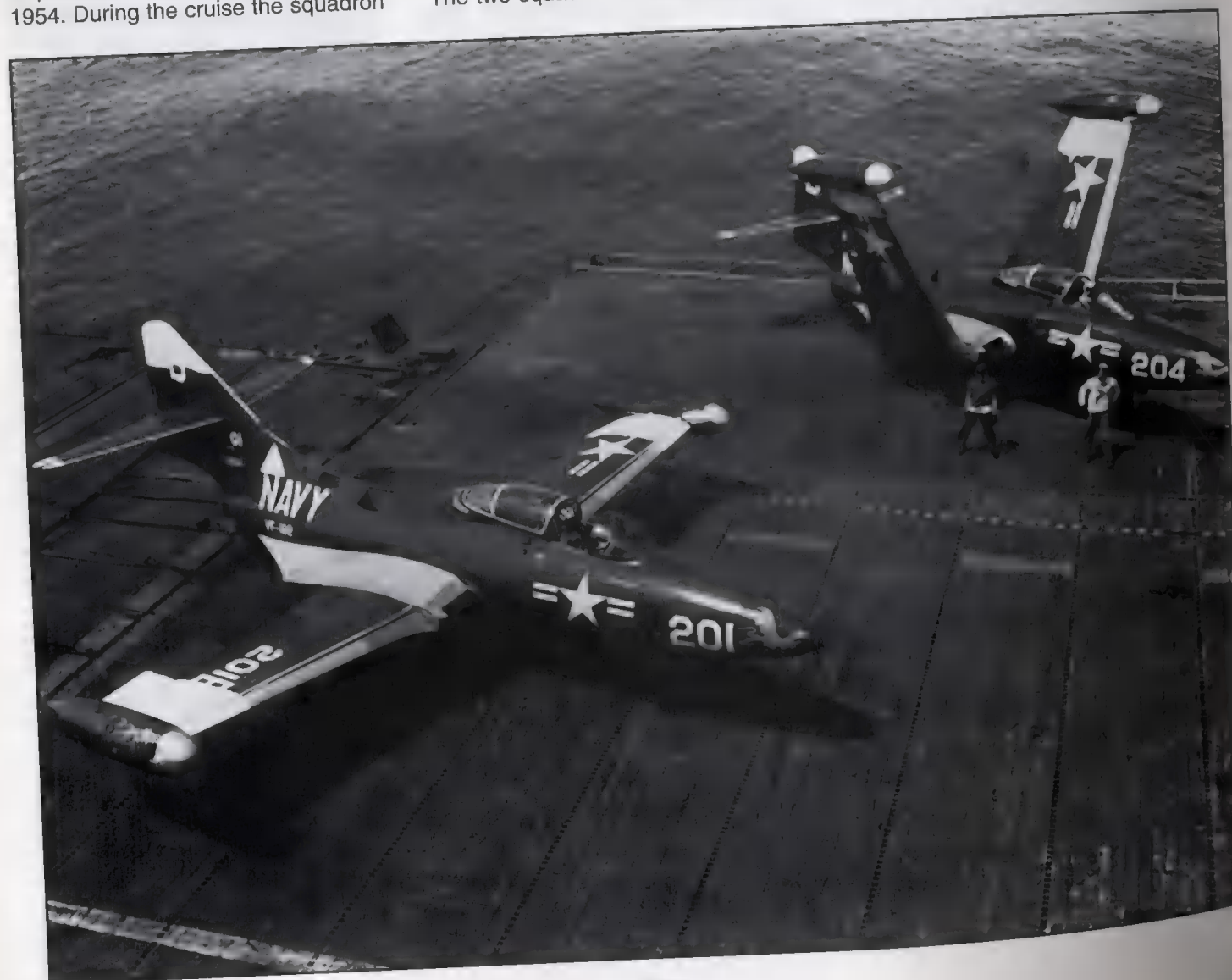


January 1953.

VF-192 took its Panthers aboard the USS Oriskany (CVA-34) from 14 September 1953 through 22 April 1954. During the cruise the squadron

was detached from the USS Oriskany and assigned to Johnson AB just outside of Tokyo for 12 days of air-to-air operations with the Air Force's 40th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS). The two squadrons shared equally in

Above, VF-192 F9F-5 at K-2 Korea. (Ben Sowaske via Warren Thompson) Below, VF-192 F9F-5s on CVA-34 on 23 March 1953 with temporary white trim and gold dragons on their noses. (National Archives)



protection of the Japanese skies by standing alert status (90 seconds from alert to take-off) 24/7.

The squadron made two intercepts in earnest. One was accomplished in overcast skies and 40 mph winds at over 200 miles from the coast. During this intercept, six bombers were acquired. The second was a night intercept on a single target traveling at over 500 mph.

The squadron also visited the US Army in Korea including visits to the front lines and watching aircraft from Task Force 77 practice close air support. From here the squadron spent two days in Seoul where the Fifth Air Force brought them up-to-speed on the current air situation in and around

Korea.

It was during this time that the ship and squadrons were the backdrop for the movie "The Bridges at Toko-ri". In fact, Mickey Rooney had taken over duties as honorary skipper of VA-195 whose real CO, LCDR Elliott, was on tour with the men of VF-192. It is VF-192's Panthers that are the featured stars of the movie, with William Holden's character, LT Brubaker, merely the supporting actor. The squadron also participated in filming "The Men of the Fighting Lady" during the same cruise.

A second deployment with Panthers aboard Oriskany occurred from 2 March through 21 September 1955. During this Far East deploy-

ment, the squadron dropped 48 tons of bombs and fired 1,100 rockets in support of Task Force 77 exercises. While doing this, squadron pilots averaged 60 arrested landings each. They also joined the 35th FIS at Yokota AFB for a month of alert status in defense of Japan.

The squadron received swept-wing F9F-6 Cougars in January 1956 and was redesignated VA-192 on 15

Below, LCDR C. N. Whited, Jr. lands his Panther F9F-5 BuNo. 126092 aboard the USS Oriskany CVA-34 on 25 September 1953 during which he loses his nose wheel. (USN)





FIGHTER SQUADRON VF-192

Above and at left, VF-192 F9F-5 125634 in natural metal finish at NAS Oakland on 26 September 1954. (Larry Smalley via William Swisher)

Below, four natural metal VF-192 F9F-5 Panthers over the Bay area in late 1954. (USN via SDAM)



March 1956. The -6s were replaced with F9F-8 and F9F-8B Cougars in June and July of 1956 and the FJ-4B took over on 10 December 1957. The Skyhawk years started in July 1959 with the A4D-2 (A-4B). The squadron

would go on to fly the A-4C/E/F versions before acquiring A-7E Corsairs on 26 February 1970. On 10 January 1986 the squadron was redesignated VFA-192 and received F/A-18A Hornets on 5 May 1986.

Above, VF-192 F9F-5 being spotted aboard the USS Oriskany in 1955. The nose, tip tank, and tail markings were white. (USN) Below, blue aircraft have natural metal wing roots. Natural metal aircraft have red nose, tail, and tip tank markings. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SIX FIFTY - THREE, VF-653 "DRAGONS"
FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FIFTY - ONE, VF-151 "BLACK KNIGHTS"



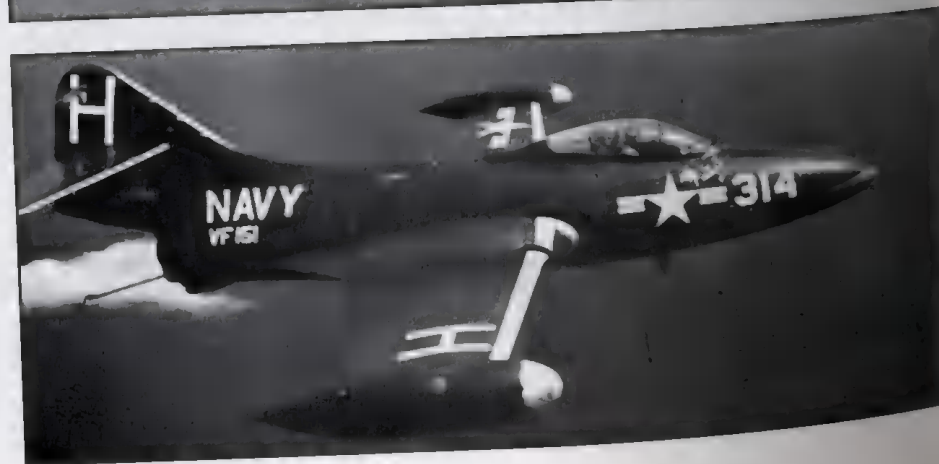
VF-151 was originally reserve squadron VF-653 stationed at NAS Akron, OH. With F4U Corsairs, the squadron deployed to Korea aboard the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) in 1951. After returning to CONUS, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-5 Panther. VF-653 deployed aboard the USS Boxer (CVA-21) from 30 March through 28 November 1953 with F9F-2s. VF-653 was redesignated VF-151 on 4 February 1953.



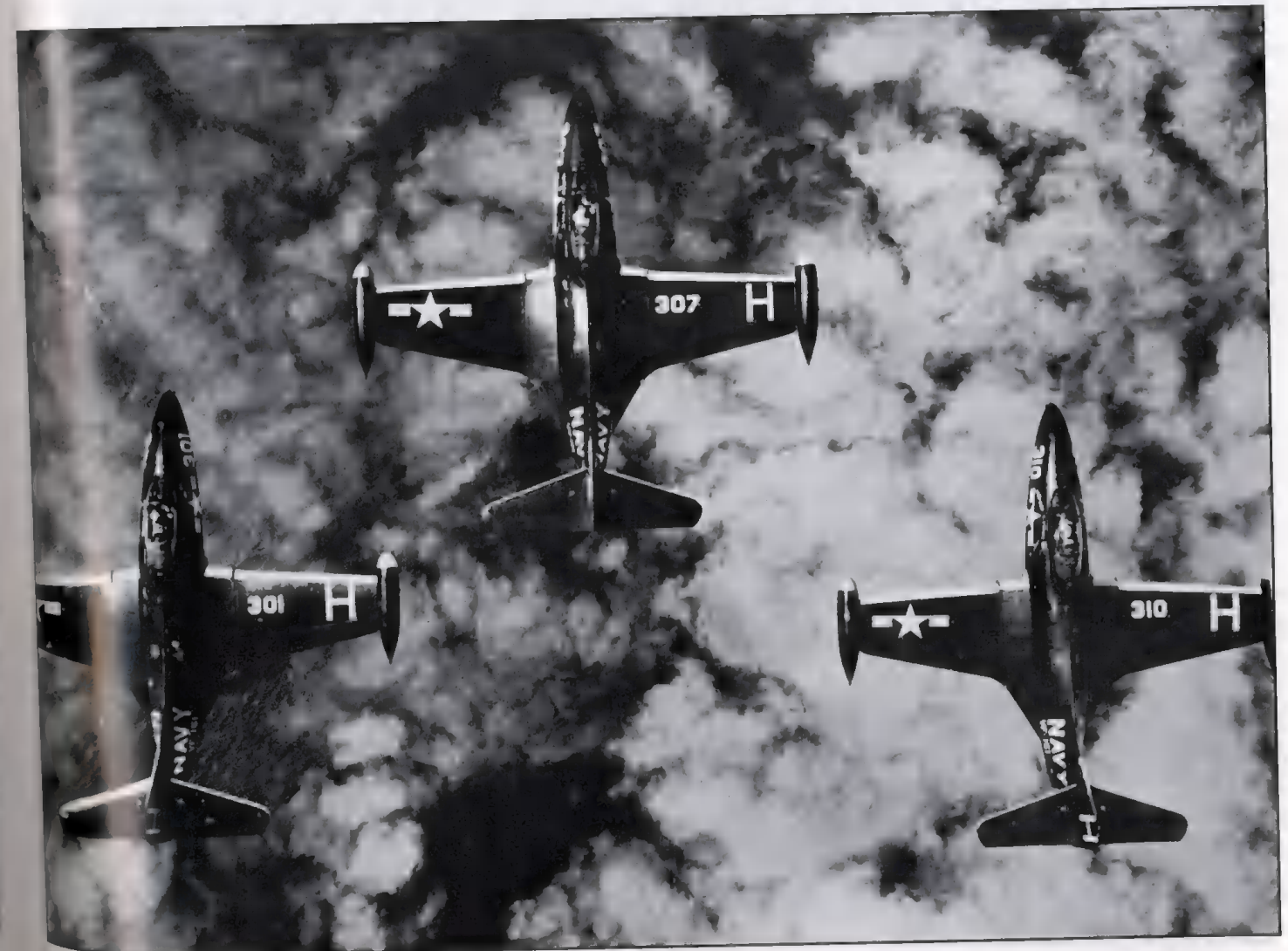
During the Boxer war cruise, LT John W. Fornof acquired some unusual kill markings on his Panther. During a post-mission de-brief he inadvertently reported killing three-and-a-half oxen. The next day, when he approached his aircraft in preparation for another mission, he found 3.5 oxen painted on the fuselage side. So, the next day he claimed destruction of a telephone pole and was



Above, VF-653 F9F-5 125480 at NAS Alameda, CA, in October 1952. (Robert Brozovich via Skyhawk Association) Below, LT Fornof admires his unusual kill markings of 3.5 oxen and 1 telephone pole aboard the Boxer. He has a VF-653 markings of 3.5 oxen and 1 telephone pole aboard the Boxer. He has a VF-653 patch on the right side of his jacket and a VF-151 patch on the left side of his flight jacket. (USN) Bottom, VF-151 F9F-2 in flight during their USS Boxer (CVA-21) war cruise. Note how the tail code "H" slants forward on the vertical fin. (USN)



Above, deck crew releases the arresting cable from a VF-151 F9F-2 123452 aboard Boxer as the aircraft taxis forward to the parking area. (USN) Below, three VF-151 F9F-2s off the coast of Korea in 1952. Note location of wing codes. (USN)





At left, at NAS North Island, CA, VF-151 F9F-2s are being hoisted aboard the USS Wasp for its 1954/55 WestPac cruise. (USN)

rewarded with a suitable kill marking right next to the oxens.

VF-151 made a second cruise with the F9F-2 from 1 September 1954 through 1955 as part of ATG-1 aboard the USS Wasp (CVA-18). During this cruise the squadron participated in the evacuation of the Tachen Islands and earned the NAVAIR Safety Award for 1954.

VF-151 was redesignated VA-151 on 1 June 1955 when the Vought F7U-3 Cutlass replaced the Panthers in June 1955. These were replaced in December 1956 with Grumman F9F-8B Cougars, which were replaced by North American FJ-4B Fury Bravos in July 1957. VA-151 was redesignated VA-23 on 1 July 1959. In May 1960 the Douglas A4D-2 Skyhawk started arriving. In December 1962, the A-4E was acquired and on 1 April 1970, VA-23 was disestablished.

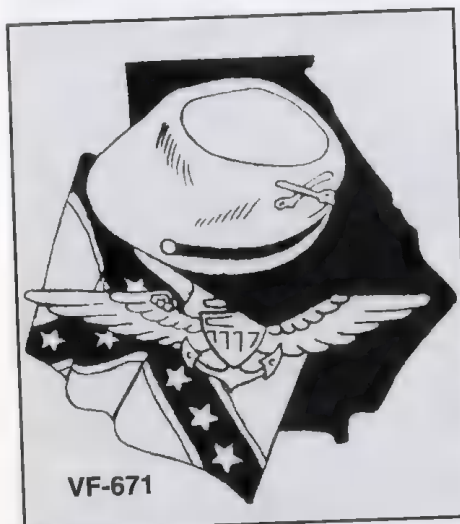
Below, VF-151 officers and chiefs pose next to one of their F9F-2 Panthers during their USS Wasp deployment. Bottom row left to right: McConkey, Sheets, Carman, Chute, Pendleton, Tappan, Malan, Merrill, Crandall, and O'Neil. Middle row: Wayhan, Thurston, Holt, Bird, Corbett, Kidd, McLaughlin, Patridge, Prouty, Moore, and Montague. Top row: Simpson, Stobbs, Boyette, Frost, Craig, Connor, Bauer, and Miodek. (USN)



Above, three Black Knights Panthers returning from a mission near Formosa on 27 May 1955 spot the ship far below. (USN)
Below, VF-151 F9F-2s 127023 and 127107 over the USS Wasp (CVA-18) on 27 May 1955. (USN via Fred Roos)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SIX SEVENTY - ONE, VF-671 FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHTY - ONE, VF-81 "CRUSADERS"



VF-671

Reserve squadron VF-671 was activated on 1 February 1951 at NAS Atlanta, GA, with the F4U-4 Corsair. A Mediterranean deployment was conducted aboard the USS Tarawa (CV-40) from 28 November 1951 through 11 June 1952. After returning to CONUS, the squadron was based at NAAS Oceana and transitioned to the F8F-2 Bearcat. In December 1952, the Grumman F9F-5 was received.

The following month, the squadron put to sea aboard the USS Antietam (CVA-36) for operational tests of the first angled deck installed on a United States carrier. On 4 February 1953, while still aboard the Antietam, VF-671 was redesignated VF-81. The squadron re-deployed its Panthers aboard the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43) from 26 April through 21 October 1953. In January and February 1954 the squadron operated from NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they set a new fleet record in aerial gunnery. Once back at Oceana, VF-81 started preparations to receive the first fleet Vought F7U-3 Cutlasses.

The first F7U-3s started arriving in May with the transition being complete in September 1954. On 1 July 1955, VF-81 was redesignated VA-66. In September 1956, F9F-8B Cougars replaced the Cutlasses and were replaced with Douglas A4D-1 Skyhawks in March 1958. The A4D-2 followed closely behind the -1 in June, and the A4D-2N (A-4C) was

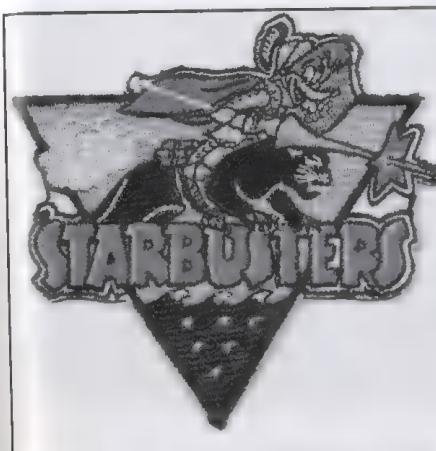


acquired in March 1961. The Vought A-7E replaced the "Scooter" in October 1970 and the squadron was disestablished on 1 October 1986.

Below, VF-671 F9F-5 lifts-off the angled deck of the USS Antietam (CVA-36) on 26 January 1953 off the coast of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Fin tip and nose trim were red. (National Archives)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVEN TWENTY - ONE, VF-721 "STARBUSTERS" FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FOUR ONE, VF-141 "STARBUSTERS/IRON ANGELS"



Reserve squadron VF-721 was called to active duty on 20 July 1950. CVG-101, with VF-721 attached, deployed to Korea aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) from 27 March through 30 November 1951.

VF-721 took its F9F-2 Panthers aboard the USS Kearsarge (CV-33) for a second War cruise from 14 September 1952 through 22 April 1953 as part of CVG-101. VF-721 was the only jet fighter squadron assigned during both Panther war

cruises. On 4 February 1953, VF-721 was redesignated VF-141.

During this cruise, the "Grey Ghost" was a VF-141 F9F Panther that sported a natural aluminum finish instead of the conventional Navy blue paint job. It was the mount of LCDR Frenchie Roberts, Commanding Officer. While on loan to LTJG Jocko Schlosser, who launched with two other VF-141 aircraft on an armed reconnaissance mission near Songjin, the "Grey Ghost" was hit by



Above, VF-721 F9F-2 123622 at NAS North Island prior to the squadron's first deployment to Korea in 1951. The noses of the VF-721 Panthers had red tulip-like markings. (USN via Fred Roos) Below, VF-721 F9F-2 Panthers aboard the USS Boxer in 1951 off the coast of Korea. The nose number was repeated on the rudder of the squadron's aircraft. (USN via W. T. Larkins)





a 37mm round in the left wing. With a hole large enough for a man to stand in, Schlosser had a difficult time returning to the Kearsarge and landing. He was greeted by LCDR Roberts, who exclaimed, "That's the last time you will get the keys to the family car."

Upon returning from the second

Above, VF-721 F9F-2 over Korea. Fin tip is red. (USN) At right, VF-721 pilots aboard Boxer in 1951. (Norb Melsek via Warren Thompson) Below, VF-721 F9F-2 over Korea in 1951. Red nose markings show up well. (USN via SDAM)



At top, VF-721 F9F-2 over Korea in 1951. (USN) Above, VF-721 F9F-2 goes feet wet, on 9 June 1951. (USN) At right, LTJG Jocko Schlosser (in helmet) and LCDR Roberts inspect damage to the aircraft the squadron called the "Grey Ghost". (USN) Below, VF-721 F9F-2 test fires guns as he flies into North Korean port of Hungnam on 23 June 1951. (National Archives)





War cruise, the Iron Angels transitioned to the McDonnell F2H-3 Banshee in late 1953. The squadron stepped up to the Douglas F4D-1 Skyray in 1956 and the McDonnell F3H-2 Demon in 1959. In May 1962

the Demons were replaced with the Vought F-8E Crusader. VF-141 was redesignated VF-53 on 15 October 1963. As VF-53, the squadron flew the F-8E and F-8J Crusader. VF-53 was disestablished on 29 January 1971.

Above, three VF-721 Panthers return to the USS Boxer (CV-21) after a mission over Korea. (USN) Below, VF-721 F9F-2 launches from the deck of the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33) on 18 September 1952. (National Archives)



A STARBUSTERS MECHANIC MEMORIES, BY BILL HANNAN

In 1951, with my aviation enthusiasm, I had expectations of becoming a pilot, however the Navy recruiter explained that the quota for aviation candidates was filled. "But", he assured me, "it will open up later, and meanwhile other opportunities are available in Naval aviation." Right! Soon after enlisting, I found myself in "boot camp" in San Diego. Eventually our boot-training was completed, and fellow model builder Jack Fox and I were sent (by train) to Aviation Machinist Mate School in Tennessee and Florida. There we were thoroughly immersed in reciprocating engine and propeller maintenance courses, and in our spare time, we managed to build and fly a few model airplanes. Thanks to our technical hobby backgrounds we graduated near the top echelon of the class, and were rewarded with our choice of available duty stations. Naturally we picked San Diego, in our home state, and this time the Navy flew us there.

Things were looking up, ah, but we were assigned to VF-721, a Panther jet squadron. So much for our intensive propeller powerplant training, and it was back to school for us, to catch up on the care and feeding of turbines.

Originally based at NAS Glenview, IL, VF-721 was a reserve squadron which had been activated for the Korean War. Most of its members were reservists who suddenly



Above, Bill Hannan climbs aboard a VF-721 Panther prior to running an engine check in 1952. (Jack Fox)

had their civilian lives rudely interrupted. Thus their attitudes were quite different than those of the more "gung ho" career officers, and this quickly became obvious to the maintenance crews, who learned to allow for the wide extremes in personalities.

Included in Air Group 101 was VF-11, the senior squadron (which they never let us forget) operating Banshees. In response to the "World Famous Red Rippers" moniker, VA-702 (with Skyraiders) dubbed themselves the "Locally Unknown Puddy Cats". VC-11, also with Skyraiders, conducted airborne-early-warning and anti-submarine duties. VF-884, the "Bitter Birds", had venerable Vought Corsairs, as did VC-3, a "night heckler" squadron. VC-61, the "Peter Peter" {photo planes} outfit, had specially modified Banshees. There were also some hulking North American AJ Savage trimotors ("two turning and one burning") aboard from time-to-time, which in spite of their folding wings and vertical tail seemed always to be in our way.

For engine starting and systems testing, our jet planes required generator-equipped jeeps, which were driven adjacent to each aircraft so that the electrical power cord could be plugged-in. There never seemed to

be enough starter jeeps to go around, and they were often shuttled, via elevator, between the flight deck and hangar deck. Theoretically each jeep had a designated driver, but in practice it was more of a first-come, first-served deal, and anyone who could locate one not in use, would commandeer it "no questions asked". Once we received a rush-call for a jeep to be sent up from the hangar-deck post-haste, and I was elected to deliver it. Since the side-deck elevator was in the "down" position, I drove the jeep onto it and gave the word for it to be raised to the flight-deck level. What I didn't know was that a topside crew simultaneously awaited the elevator to send down a dud Panther. Thus, when the elevator reached flight-deck level, I was horrified to see the plane-pushers already had the heavy F9F in motion, headed straight at the jeep! Fortunately, the plane captain in the cockpit slammed on the brakes, stopping just short of pushing me over the side. I might not have been missed, but jeeps were scarce!

Most of our heavy-duty maintenance work was performed on the

hangar deck, where conditions were certainly better than topside. Which is not to say that life was comfortable there either. Yes, we had a roof over our heads, and it was not quite as cold, although when the elevators were down and the side curtains were open, it could be like a wind-tunnel. With steel everywhere, the acoustics annoyingly reflected and amplified such sounds as a dropped-wrench. And the many closely-spaced aircraft formed hazardous barriers to walking. In addition to the sharp trailing edges of the wings and tail surfaces, every airplane was secured to deck perforations with wire cables rigged at angles to resist the ship's rolling. Especially at night, these nearly invisible cables often caused loud, pained expletives when shins struck them, frequently drawing blood, even through our canvas dungarees.

As for being a safer location, not necessarily. One time during exceptionally stormy sea conditions, the ship was rolling to such an extent that a heavy fork-lift broke loose from its moorings, and was roaring back and forth across the hangar deck, like a rampaging rhinoceros, crashing into anything in its way, while heroic crewmen tried everything imaginable to halt it. Finally, it rammed into one side hard enough to pause momentarily, and was quickly subdued with chains. It had inflicted considerable damage to some of the ship's piping, but thankfully, no one was injured.

Finally, after completing more than 6,000 aircraft missions over Korea, the Kearsarge was relieved from duty by another carrier. Sadly, the squadron had lost three pilots, LT Charles Glisson, LCDR Robert Hopping and ENS Richard Stein.

Safely stationed near San Diego, at NAS Miramar, our squadron underwent a change of command, aircraft and designation. Our new skipper was CDR Frank E. Standing, our new aircraft were Banshees, and for reasons we never quite understood our squadron became VF-141. It was back-to-school time for the maintenance crews, to learn the characteristics of our new aircraft.

Trying to compare a Grumman product to a McDonnell product is a lot like trying to compare different brands of automobiles. Even if they were manufactured in the same country, their engineering philosophies might as well have originated from different planets! The Grumman "iron-works" in New York had a lengthy heritage in the design and manufacture of Navy aircraft, and thus well qualified to understand their particular requirements. By contrast, McDonnell in Missouri was quite new to the tail-hook business, but perhaps a bit more progressive in outlook. From a pilot's point-of-view, the Banshee may have been preferred because of their higher power-to-weight ratios, greater maneuverability and theoretical twin-engine safety advantages. On the other hand, the sturdy Panthers were capable of absorbing more punishment, and in my opinion were much easier to maintain.

For service or replacement of a Panther's engine, the entire rear of the aircraft aft of the wing was detachable. This could be accomplished quite quickly, as only a small number of fasteners plus some plumbing and electrical connections needed to be undone. On the other hand, removing a Banshee engine was rather challenging. The underwing engine cowlings had to be removed, via numerous stubborn fas-

Above, Bill Hannan pauses next to Starbuster 111. Note the white dividing lines between the red nose and the blue fuselage. Evidently the white lines were not used during the earlier USS Boxer deployment. (Hannan)

teners, and the aircraft's weight supported at jack points. Then the lower half of the wing-spar, which surrounded the engine, was unfastened and pulled down, and the various mechanical, plumbing and electrical connections detached.

Notes to modelers: the blue Panthers in our squadron varied considerably in their coloration, a fact noticeable even in printed photographs. This seems an annoyance to some modelers who like to base their color choice conclusions upon paperwork such as "official directives", rather than actual research. In real life, things are seldom so cut-and-dried. Suffice it to say that even the darkest of the lot was clearly blue, not the blue-black seen on some review models. Which is not to say there never were any, but merely to establish that to my knowledge there were none in our squadron. The most distinctive aspect of our markings were the white-outlined red nose "Starbursts". These were essentially freehand masked, and painted, and thus varied from example to example.

FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVEN FORTY - TWO, VF-742 FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHTY - TWO, VF-82 "IRON MEN"



Reserve squadron VF-742 was called to active duty on 2 February 1951 and were initially equipped with F4U-4 Corsairs. In 1952, the F9F-2 replaced the Corsairs. They started transitioning to the F9F-5 Panther in September 1952 and completed the transition in November. On 4 February 1953, VF-742 was redesignated VF-82.

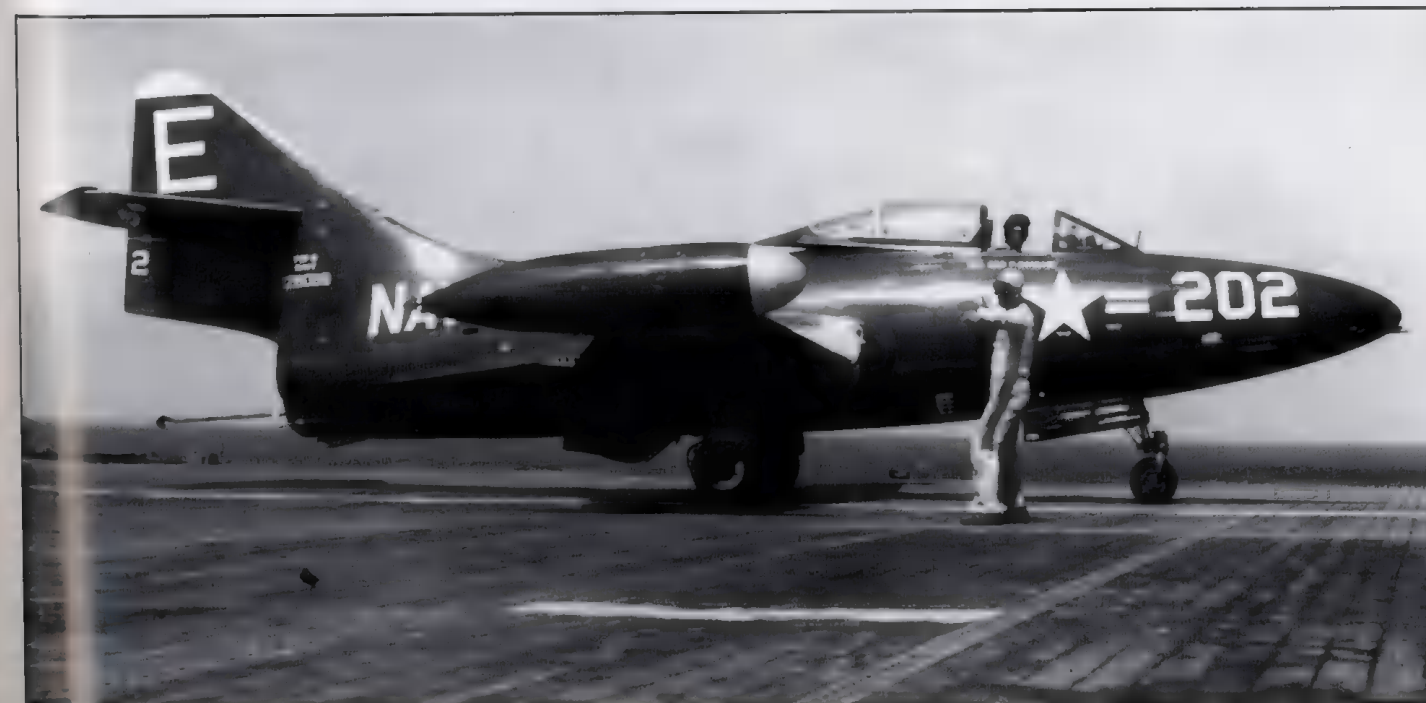
The squadron took part in carrier trials in the Atlantic of the Navy's first angled deck carrier, the USS Antietam (CVA-36). The first series of tests were conducted off of

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, from 26 February through 8 March 1953. On 27 April, the squadron reported back aboard for "heavy weather" trials. These only lasted a week, but the squadron was brought back aboard for a VIP cruise on 19 May. The squadron returned in late May only to report back aboard from 11 June through 21 July 1953. During this cruise the squadron was to demonstrate to the British the benefits of the angled deck and allow them to participate in flight operations.

In 1954, VF-82 transitioned to the

F2H-2/2N Banshee. The F3H-2N Demon was flown from 1956 until the squadron was disestablished on 15 April 1959.

Above, VF-742 F9F-5 126139 rolls to a stop after catching the number 3 wire during carrier trials aboard the USS Antietam on 14 January 1953. (National Archives) Below, VF-82 F9F-5 126089 makes the 25,000th landing aboard Antietam (CVA-36) while operating off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on 9 February 1953. (National Archives)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVEN EIGHTY - ONE, VF-781 "PACEMAKERS"
FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE TWENTY - ONE, VF-121 "PACEMAKERS"



Los Alamitos reserve squadron VF-781 was established on 1 July 1946 flying F6F-5 Hellcats. The squadron volunteered for active duty 100% at the outbreak of the Korean War in July 1950. LCDR Collin Oveland moved his squadron to NAS North Island where it combined with three other fighter squadrons and one attack squadron to form CVG-102. The squadron started forming-up on the F4U-4 but transitioned instead to F9F-2 Panthers by the end of the year.

Due to the overcrowding at North Island and its impact on the squadron's ability to transition to jets and become combat proficient in them, LCDR Oveland petitioned the AirPac training officer to allow VF-781 to relocate to NAAS Miramar 20 miles away. Oveland moved his squadron in one day and commenced flight operations the next day at 0800. As a result of the move, VF-781 became the first Navy fighter squadron to be assigned to Miramar after the Marines gave up the base.

Fuel contamination struck on 9 January 1951 when two Panthers flamed-out and made emergency landings at Miramar. One aircraft was damaged but repairable after just making the runway, while the other landed short in the rocks and brush. Although more damaged, this aircraft was also repairable.

Fuel pump seizure was determined to be the cause and it was



Above and below, VF-781, F9F-2s are loaded aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) for the squadron's first Korean War cruise on 3-24-51. (USN)

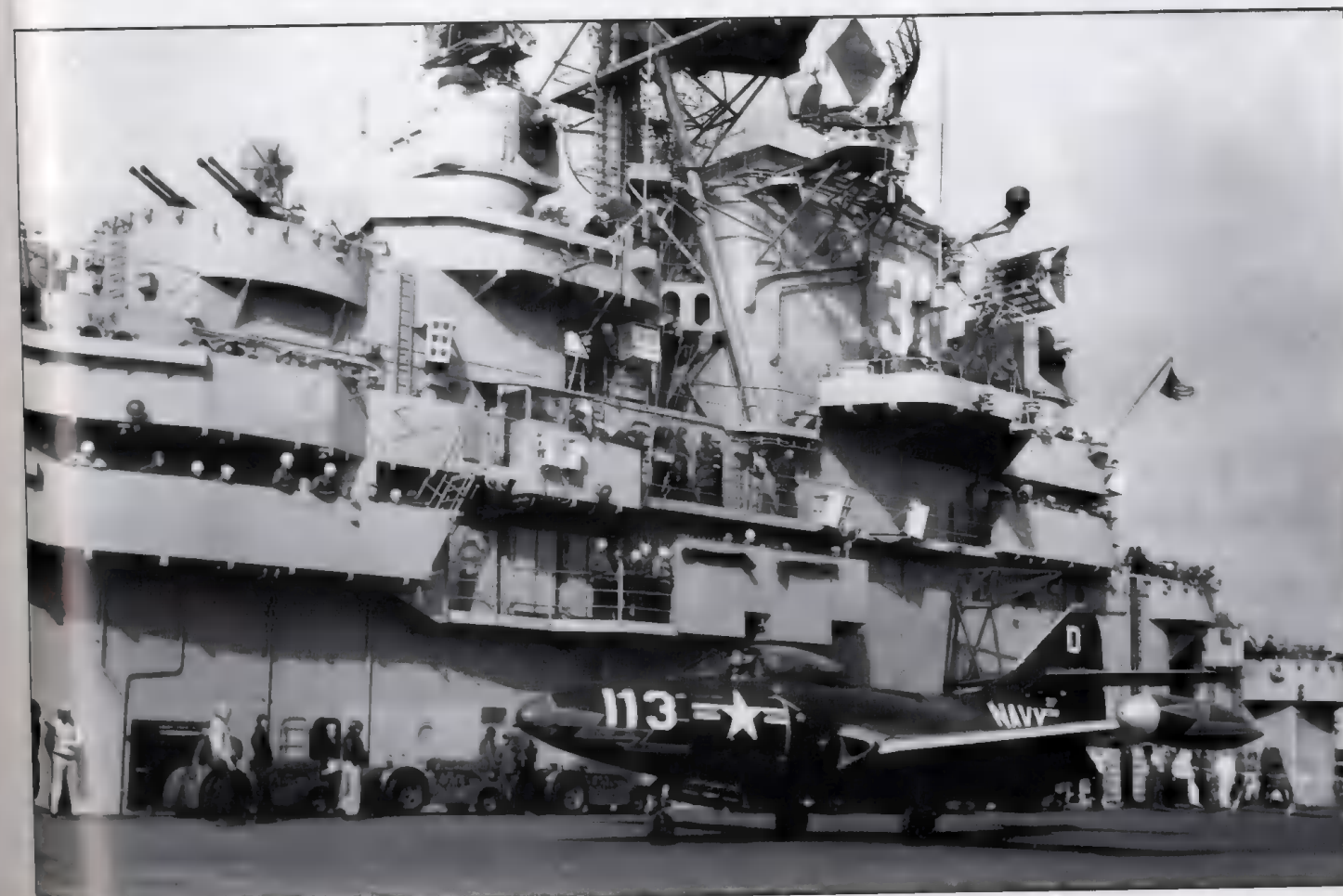


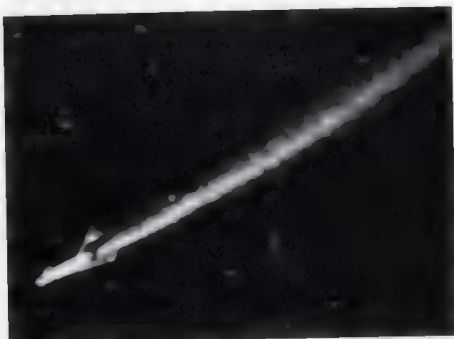
found that coral dust was the culprit. The fuel trucks used to fuel the Panthers had previously been assigned to islands in the Pacific. The dust did not affect the propeller aircraft's engines, so after three weeks

at Miramar, VF-781 moved to NAAS El Centro, CA.

On 10 May 1951, CVG-102 reported aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31) and left

Above, VF-781 F9F-2 123603 lands long during carrier qualifications aboard USS Oriskany (CV-34) on 28 March 1951. (National Archives) Below, VF-781 F9F-2 113/D taxis forward after landing on 29 March 1951. (USN)





Above, gun camera footage showing LTJG Middleton's MiG-15 going down on 18 November 1952. (USN) At right Rowlands, Williams, Middleton and Elwood all encountered MiGs on the 18th of November 1952, with Middleton and Williams scoring kills. (USN) Below, the first Canadian exchange pilot to fly combat with the US Navy was LT Joseph J. MacBrien of Toronto. (USN)



Below, VF-781 F9F-2 in May 1951. Nose, tip tank and fin tip markings were red bordered by white. (National Archives)



North Island for the war zone. The Pacemakers conducted five combat line periods for 1,925 combat sorties. CVG-102 returned to CONUS on 17 December and moved to NAAS Miramar.

A personnel turnover took place and LCDR S. R. Holm took command. With a mixed bag of F9F-2s and F9F-5s, VF-781 participated in Operation Signpost on 24 July 1952. This was a five-day joint Air Force and Navy Los Angeles-through-San Diego air defense exercise. During the operation, the squadrons average scramble time was 3.5 minutes and the average turn-around time of 18.5 minutes.

Carrier qualifications were conducted aboard the USS Oriskany (CV-34) from 12 August through 6 September with new pilots making a minimum of 16 landings and second

tour pilots completing a minimum of 8 landings.

The Oriskany deployed with CVG-102 from 15 September 1952 through 18 May 1953. VF-781 commenced combat operations on 1 November and on 18 November 1952, the squadron's Panthers engaged seven MiG-15s off the coast of North Korea. The battle occurred at 31,000 feet, and when the smoke cleared, two MiGs had gone to a watery grave and two others were limping home with battle damage. LT E. R. Williams and LTJG J. D. Middleton each claimed a MiG and LTJG D. M. Rowlands was credited with damaging another.

Of his kill, LT Elmer Williams related: "As the four came toward us and reached firing range, I turned hard left into them, spoiling the effectiveness of their run. I continued my

wrapped-up turn and came on around for a tail shot at the last MiG. I commenced firing from 15° off his tail and my first burst sent him into an uncontrolled spiral. Dave Rowlands followed this crippled MiG down to 8,000 feet where he left it smoking in a deep graveyard spiral. Later, gun camera film confirmed the kill of this MiG"

LTJG Middleton's kill was unusual in that after his rudder cable was severed by a MiG's cannon he succeeded in bagging a MiG-15 while diving from the area in an attempt to escape. While making his escape, a MiG jumped him but missed and as the MiG reversed course, Middleton was able to down him with a full-deflection shot.

During this cruise, four pilots (LT Charles E. Guthrie, LTJG Henry W. Eagan, ENS Roy Taylor, and ENS Jack Carter) while low on fuel landed aboard the USS Kearsarge. The aircraft were refueled for their trip back to the Oriskany and were covered with good-natured graffiti.

On 4 February 1953, while off the coast of Korea, VF-781 was redesignated VF-121. The squadron completed two more line periods before



returning to San Diego aboard the USS Oriskany (CV-34) on 18 May 1953.

Once back at Miramar, VF-121 under the command of CDR J. E. Savage, transitioned to the new Grumman F9F-6 Cougar. A Boxer deployment was made and then the squadron obtained F9F-8 Cougars. These were taken on a deployment aboard the Hancock and in 1956 the FJ-3M Fury was acquired. In 1958 the

Above and below, VF-121 F9F-5s aboard the USS Oriskany in 1953. Nose flashes were red bordered by white and fin tip was red. (USN)

F11F-1 was acquired and in April the squadron became the RAG for both Tigers and Demons. In October 1962, they became the F-4 Phantom RAG, a job they performed until disestablishment in September 1980.



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVEN EIGHTY - THREE, VF-783 "MINUTE MEN"
FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE TWENTY - TWO, VF-122 "BLACK ANGELS"



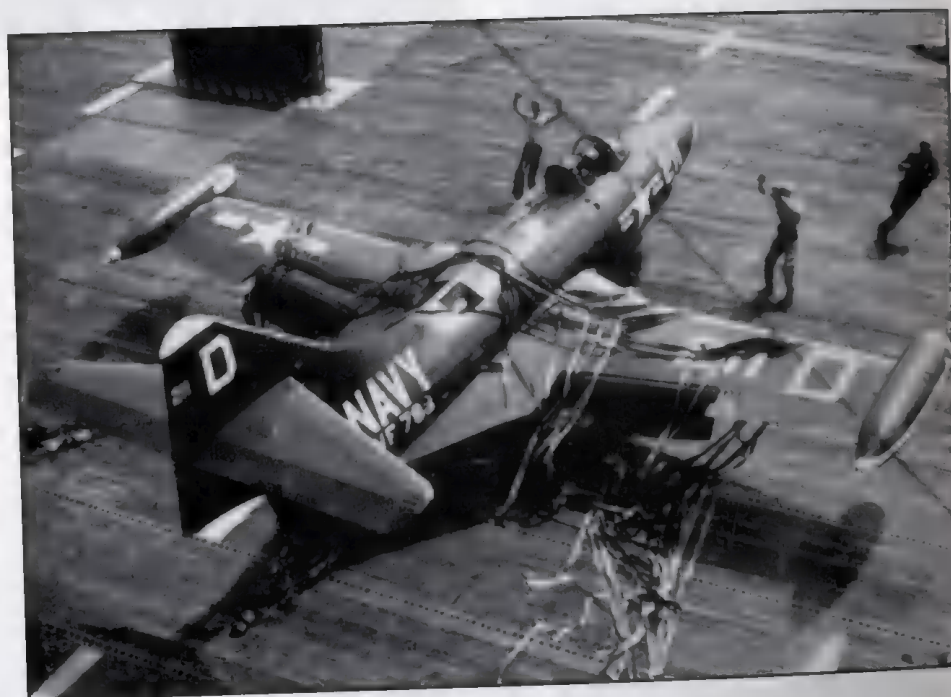
Above, Below, LTJG Bill Eagan poses next to his AAA-shredded tip tank. (USN)



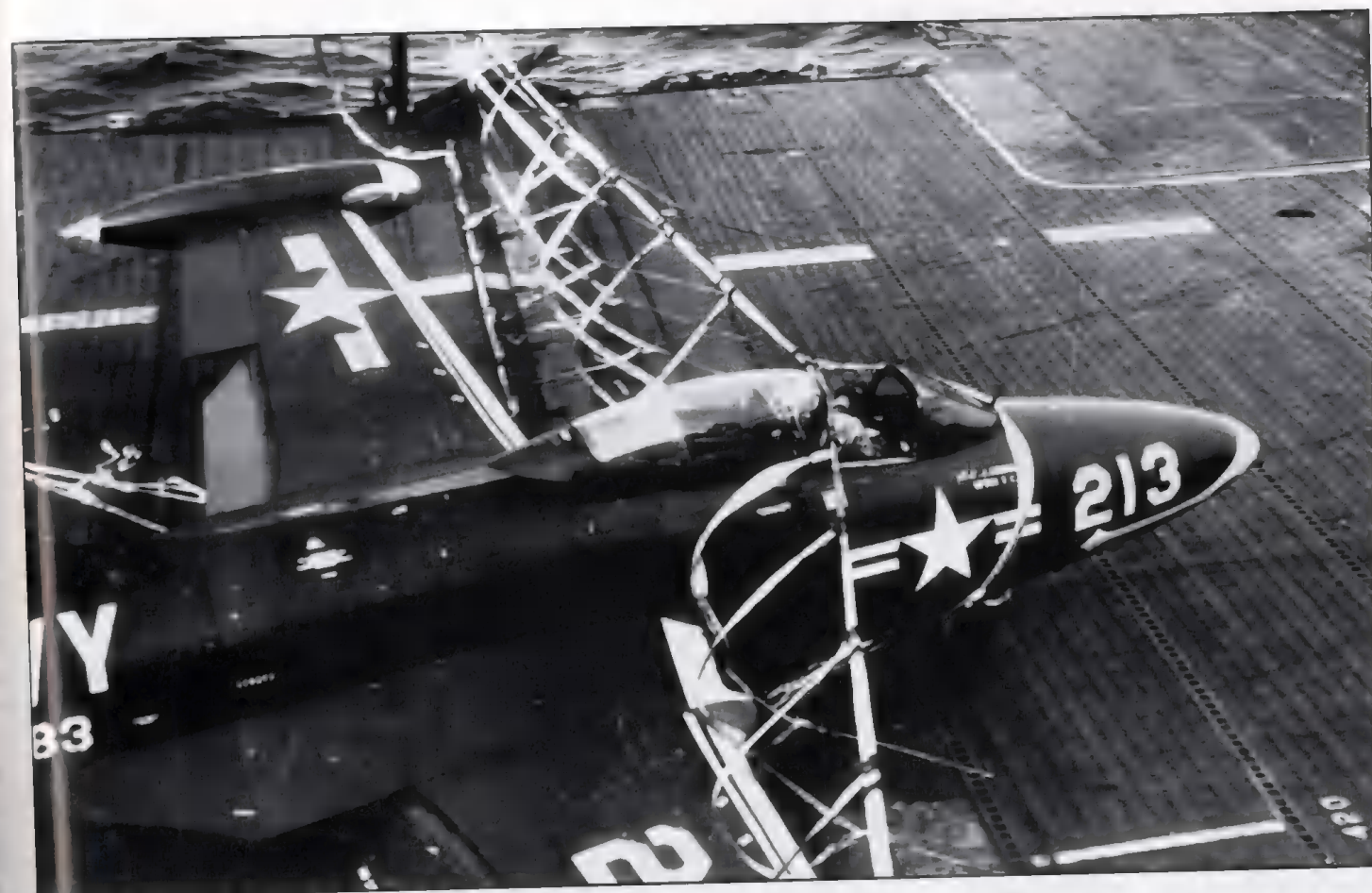
Reserve squadron VF-783 was called to active duty on 20 July 1950 in response to the Korean War. The squadron deployed to Korea with its F9F-5 Panthers aboard the USS Oriskany (CV-34) from 10 February 1952 through 2 May 1953 as part of CVG-102. While at sea, off the coast of Korea, VF-783 was redesignated VF-122 on 4 February 1953.

During this cruise, LTJG Bill Eagan returned to the USS Oriskany with an "ack ack" shredded right tip-tank on his F9F-5. The tip-tank was replaced and the aircraft was flying combat the next day. The squadron lost F9F-5 126219 on takeoff from the Oriskany on 22 March 1953. On 13 April, 125963 crashed at sea as a result of a flameout.

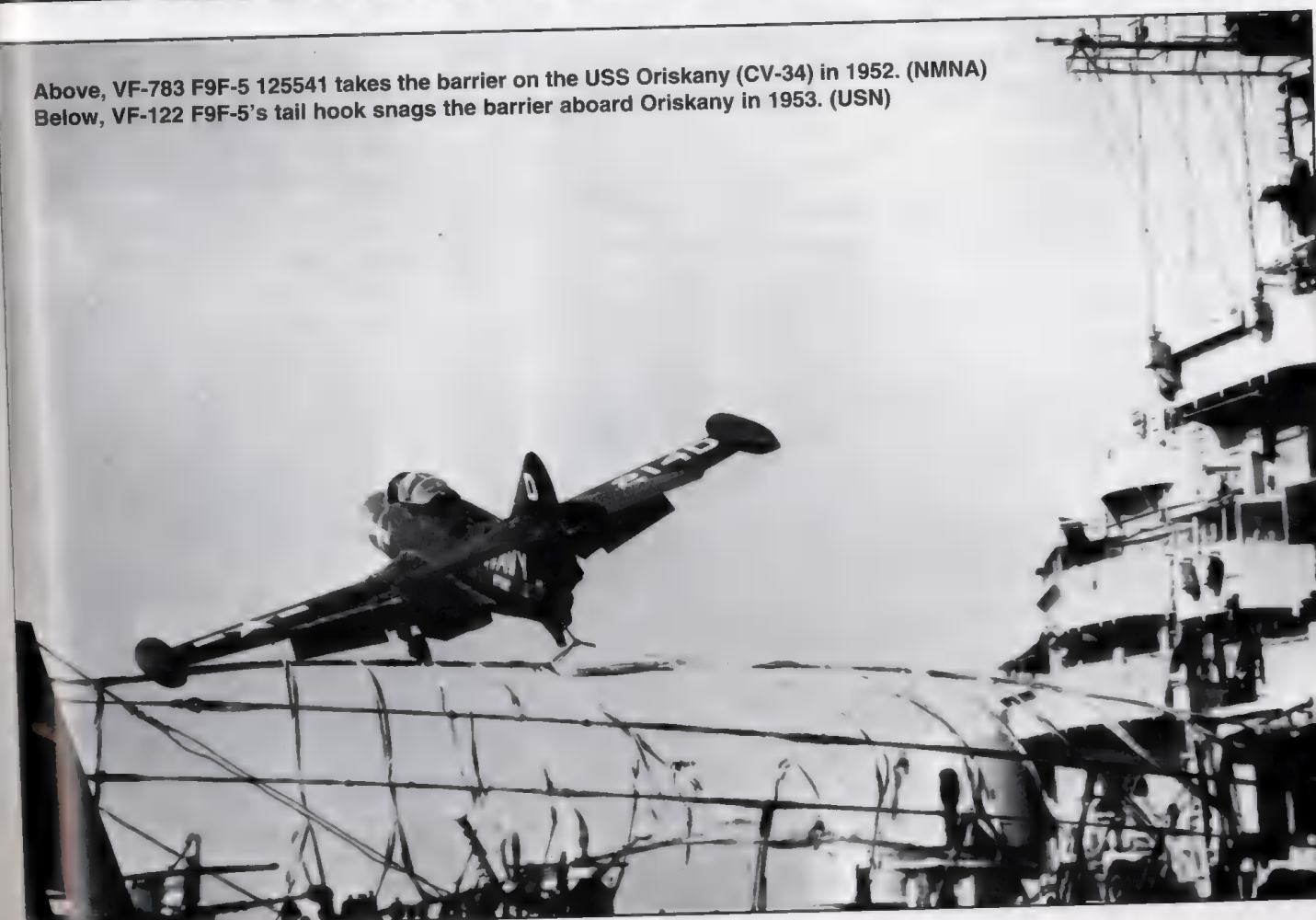
The F3H-2N Demon was received in early 1957 and was flown until the squadron was disestablished on 1 May 1958.



Above, VF-783 F9F5 with white trim takes the barrier aboard the USS Oriskany (CV-34) in 1952. Note canopy was blown prior to landing. (USN) Bottom, VF-783 F9F-5 125541 in flight over Korea in 1952. Nose number 213 was repeated on the rudder. "Sharon" was written on the nose. (NMNA)



Above, VF-783 F9F-5 125541 takes the barrier on the USS Oriskany (CV-34) in 1952. (NMNA)
 Below, VF-122 F9F-5's tail hook snags the barrier aboard Oriskany in 1953. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVEN NINETY - ONE, VF-791 "HAMMERING HOSES" **FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FOURTY - TWO, VF-142 "FIGHTING FALCONS"**

On 1 November 1949, VF-791 was established at NAS Memphis with F6F-5 Hellcats. VF-791 was called to active duty on 20 July 1950. By the 26th the squadron found itself at NAS San Diego, CA, where they set about transitioning to the Vought F4U-4 Corsair. A war cruise aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) followed with the squadron returning to San Diego on 24 October 1951. The squadron received two F9F-2 Panthers in March 1952, but proceeded to be the first Pacific Fleet squadron to receive the F9F-5 Panthers.



Carrier trials were conducted aboard CVs 33, 45 and 47. Weapons training was conducted at NAAS El Centro in late November. While at El Centro, the squadron suffered its first fatality. LT Harold C. Hofmeister was killed when his Panther suffered a right wing locking pin failure. It occurred at 25,000 feet and his wing folded and the aircraft went straight in. Also while at El Centro the squadron was filmed doing rocket attacks which was used in the movie "Men of the Fighting Lady".

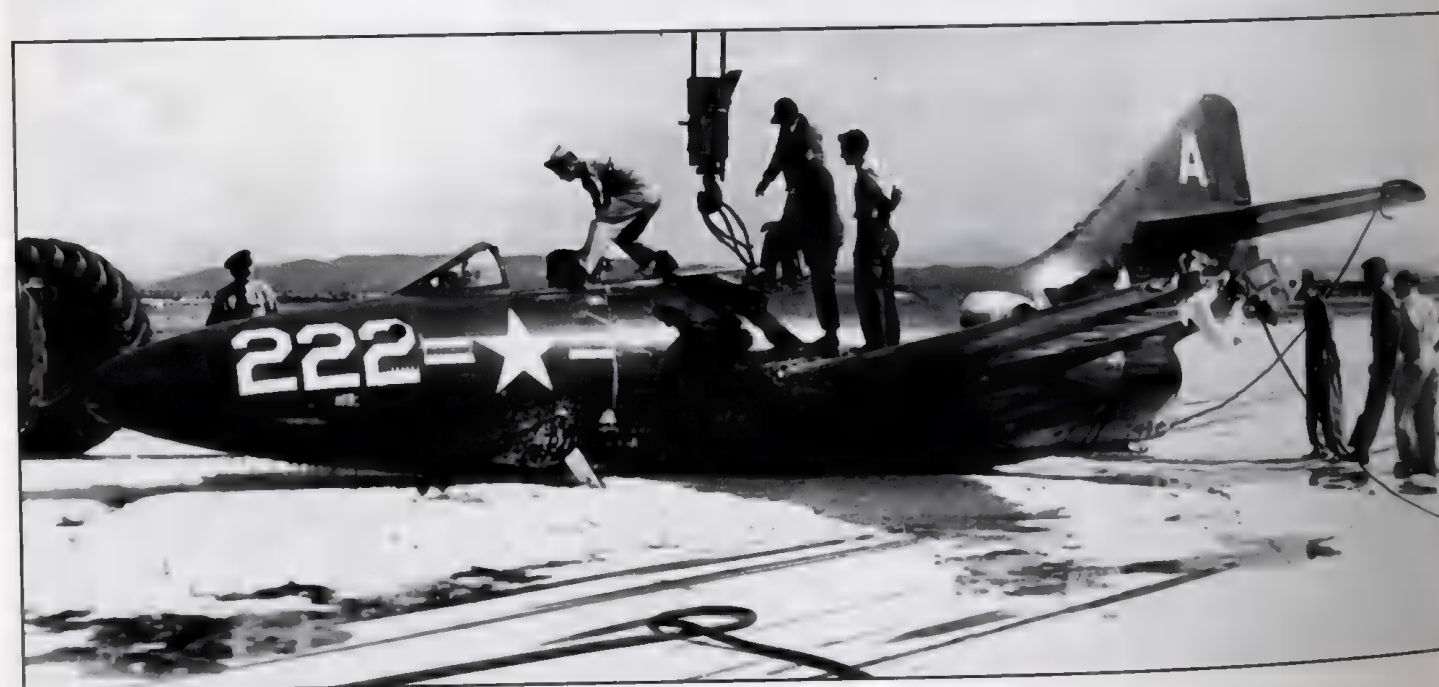
VF-791 transferred to NAS Miramar on 4 December 1952 and finished the year with 5,921.7 flight hours. On 4 February 1953, the



squadron was redesignated VF-142 when reserve Air Group 101 (CVG-101) was augmented into the regular Navy as CVG-14.

On 10 March, LT Leo Kelly's aircraft was severely damaged after a midair with an Air Force F-86 from the 94th FIS at George AFB, CA. Kelly

Below, VF-142 F9F-5 125452 made an emergency landing at Miramar after a midair with an F-86 on 10 March 1953. Aircraft still carried VF-791 on the aft fuselage even though the squadron had been redesignated VF-142. (NMNA)



was conducting a check flight with a new pilot when 1stLt K. H. Rapp tried to pass vertically between the two Panthers. Rapp misjudged his separation and tore off over a third of Kelly's left wing and rode the F-86 down to his death. Kelly nursed the aircraft back to Miramar and made a gear-up landing in foam.

Air Group 14 returned from Korea

on 17 March 1953 and VF-142 rejoined its parent organization. In May 1953, the squadron transitioned to the Grumman F9F-6 Cougar. The Cougars gave way to Furys in March 1956 when the squadron received the FJ-3M. The Furys were replaced with F8U-1 Crusaders in September 1957 and received the F4H-1 in February 1962. The squadron was redesignated VF-96 on 1 June and the F4H-1

Above, VF-142 squadron photo. (USN)
Below, another view of VF-791/VF-142 F9F-5 125452. Note the sheared off left wing tip. (NMNA)

became the F-4B in September 1962. The squadron was disestablished on 30 June 1975.



FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHT TWENTY - ONE, VF-821
FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FORTY - THREE, VF-143 "KINGPINS"



Reserve squadron VF-821 was called to active duty on 20 July 1950 in response to the Korean War.

CVG-101, with VF-821 attached, deployed to Korea aboard the USS Boxer (CV-21) from 27 March through 30 November 1951.

The squadron returned to Korea aboard the USS Essex (CV-9) for their second Panther war cruise from 16 January through 6 February 1953.



On 4 February 1953, VF-821 was redesignated VF-143. VF-143 was disestablished on 1 April 1958.

At top, VF-821 F9F-2 during snow storm aboard Boxer in 1951. Nose and fin tip were white. (via Don Priest) Below, VF-821 F9F-2 being untangled after a barrier engagement aboard Boxer in 1951. (Jim Dodge via Warren Thompson)



Above, VF-821 F9F-2 123051 in 1955. Tail code was censored out. (National Archives) Below, VF-821 Panther takes the barrier aboard the USS Essex (CV-9) off the coast of Korea in August 1952. (USN)



FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHT THIRTY - ONE, VF-831 FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FIFTY - THREE, VF-153 "BLUE TAIL FLIES"



Reserve squadron VF-831 was called to active duty from NAS Floyd Bennett Field, NY, on 1 February 1951 with F6F Hellcats. The first Grumman F9F-2 arrived five days later to replace the obsolete Hellcats. They joined Air Group 15 at NAS Moffett Field, CA, in April. They sailed aboard the USS Antietam (CV-36) for Korea on 8 September. By October the squadron was online with Task Force 77 off the coast of Korea.

The primary mission of the squadron was to concentrate interdiction fire on North Korean supply

routes, including railroad tracks and equipment, bridges, highways, and supply areas. During their first war cruise, the squadron fired 756,490 rounds of 20mm ammunition, 509 rockets and 240 tons of bombs. Luckily, no squadron pilots were lost and the last combat sortie was flown on 17 March 1952. Total combat hours flown during this deployment was 213,116.

By May 1952, the squadron had returned to Moffett Field to await arrival of the improved F9F-5 Panther. CDR A. J. Denean was relieved as Commanding Officer by LCDR G. E. Miller and a period of intensive operational training got underway. On 24 January 1953, the squadron sailed for Korea aboard the USS Princeton (CVA-37) to commence a second war deployment with the Panther jet. While at sea, the squadron was augmented into the regular Navy and redesignated VF-153 on 4 February 1953. The squadron commenced combat operations in March, concentrating on close air support and supply route interdiction. On 15 June, the squadron assisted in setting a record of 184

sorties flown by one Air Group in a single day. A second Air Group record was set by Air Group 15 by completing a 55-day tour of continuous operations on the line.

It was during this period that the "Blue Tail Fly" legend came into being. The squadron was flying both natural metal and blue-painted aircraft and two of these, one blue and one silver, had been shot-up beyond repair. Of these two, the squadron was able to construct one salvageable aircraft. This aircraft had a blue tail of one aircraft grafted onto the silver forward fuselage and wings of another. Once completed, the aircraft continued combat operations in Korea until the Princeton's war deployment ended on 21 September 1953. During the second war cruise, the squadron flew 1700 combat sorties, dropped 750 tons of bombs, and fired 260,000 rounds of 20mm ammunition.

Below, VF-831 F9F-2 127142 off the coast of Korea in 1952. Fin tip and nose flash were blue. (USN vis SDAM)



Above, VF-831 F9F-2 on-board the Antietam in January 1952 with two standard 5" rockets and one high-velocity 5" rocket used for tank busting. (USN) Below, VF-831 F9F-2 127142 in foreground, along with a VF-837 F9F-2, escort a VC-61 F9F-2P photo Panther, returning to the Antietam with tail hooks down. (USN via Fred Roos)





Above, VF-153 F9F-5 126230 in foreground with 51 mission hash marks on the fuselage side off the coast of Korea. VF-154 F9F-5 is in background. (USN) Below, two VF-153 F9F-5s escort a VC-61 Panther off Korea. Note mission markings are carried by both VF-153 and VF-154 aircraft. (USN)



Above, VF-153's famous Blue-Tail-Fly was two combat-damaged F9F-5s that were salvaged to make one flyable aircraft. (USN) At right, a VF-153 F9F-5 as seen from above from a photo Panther during their Korean deployment. (USN)

After returning to Moffett Field, the Panthers were replaced by F9F-6 Cougars in October 1953. The Cougars were replaced with FJ-3 Furies in March 1955, which in turn were replaced again with Cougars, this time the F9F-8. The F9F-8B started arriving to serve alongside the -8s in April 1956. On 15 December 1956, the squadron was redesignated VA-153 in preparation to receiving the Douglas A4D-1 Skyhawk on 12 February 1957. The squadron went on to fly four other versions of the "Scooter": the A4D-2, A4D-2N/A-4C, A-4E, and A-4F. The Vought A-7A replaced the Skyhawks on 14 September 1969 and the A-7B was received in May 1973. VA-153 was disestablished on 30 September 1977.





Above, VF-153 F9F-5 crosses the fantail of the USS Princeton on its way to an arrested landing. The nose number and tail code were repeated on the wing flaps. (USN) Below, well-worn VF-153 F9F-5 128230 off the coast of Korea. The aircraft displayed 51 mission marks on the fuselage. (USN via William T. Larkins)



FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHT THIRTY - SEVEN, VF-837 "GRAND SLAMMERS" FIGHTER SQUADRON ONE FIFTY - FOUR, VF-154 "BLACK KNIGHTS"



The history of VF-837 can be traced back to reserve unit VBF-718 at Floyd Bennett Field, NAS New York. With F6F-5s the squadron was redesignated VF-68A on 1 February 1947. F4U-4 and FG-1D Corsairs were added and the squadron was reorganized under the Air Reserve program and designated VF-837, on 1 December 1949. Also in December the squadron received FH-1 Phantoms in addition to the Corsairs. They were called to active duty on 1 February 1951 because of the advent of the Korean War and were transferred to NAS Moffett Field, CA.

At the time of activation, the squadron was made up of 27 officers and 76 enlisted personnel. The squadron immediately started an extensive training program designed to speed conversion to the Grumman F9F-2 Panther and get them into the war. Pilots and crew were trained at Grumman's Bethpage plant at Long Island, and at the Naval Air Technical Training Command, NAS Quonset Point, R. I.

Once the squadron's 18 Panthers were delivered a weapons training deployment was conducted at NAAS El Centro, CA. While at El Centro, the squadron's Panthers were grounded for fuel contamination. After the aircraft were repaired, FCLP training on the Antietam took place in August 1951. The carrier qualifications were marred by a barrier crash and the loss



of an aircraft due to a "cold" catapult shot. A second aircraft was lost when it was dropped from deck height to the loading pier below at NAS North Island, CA.

With 16 aircraft VF-837 embarked on the USS Antietam (CV-36) on 8 September 1951. The squadron was comprised of 21 pilots, 3 ground officers and 166 enlisted men. Next stop was Pearl Harbor, where the squadron almost lost another aircraft. One of the Panthers was grounded at NAS Barbers Point due to mechanical problems. By the time the F9F-2 was repaired, the other CAG-15 aircraft had been flown aboard and could not be re-spotted to accommodate ferrying the Panther to the ship. The squadron CO, LCDR Roland Kenton, left Barbers Point with almost empty fuel tanks and landed at Ford Island's closed airfield where the Antietam picked up the aircraft and VF-837's skipper.

The Antietam reported on-line off

Above, VF-837 pilots at Grumman's Bethpage plant where they received training and 18 new F9F-2s. Standing, left to right: Bob Schappert, "Fuzzy" Foster, Don Fox, Larry Gebert, Ed Latkey, Dick Campbell, Tony Paulter, Neil Gallagher, Lem Arnold, CO Roland Kenton, Bob Stephens, XO Tim Donohue, Stu Crapser, George Bruinard, Dave O'Connor and Charles Hamm. Kneeling: John Commons, John Rupp, Frank Nelson, Roger Hall, Lou Humphrey, Ed Wisney and Dan Van Gordon. All pilots were wearing aviation greens, a uniform unique to Naval Aviators and Naval Flight Officers. (Grumman) Below, VF-837 F9F-2 Panther with New York's R tail code in March 1951 at Floyd Bennett Field. (via Burger)

the coast of Korea on 15 October 1951. The next day, the squadron attacked targets from Kilchu to the Chosin Reservoir and south to Hungnam and Wonsan. Attacks continued throughout October on bridges, oil tanks, rail lines, supply





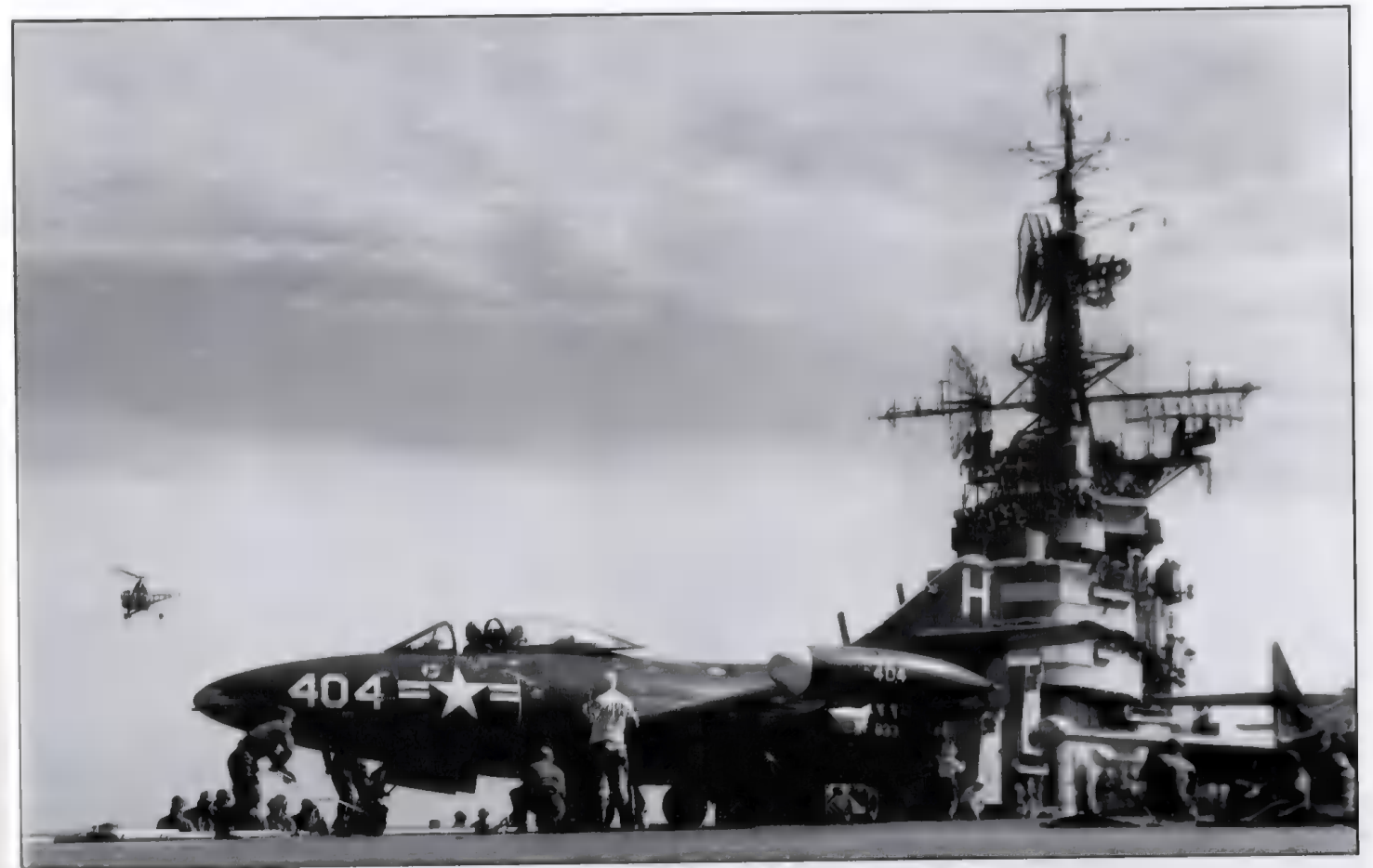
Above taking-off and taxiing at bottom, VF-837 F9F-2 125098 landed at Buchanan Field on 12 May 1951 to talk to a fellow pilot who had made an emergency landing at the field. The aircraft was devoid of any squadron colors or markings besides the squadron numbers on the aft fuselage. (William T. Larkins) Below, VF-837 aircraft with tails removed undergo repairs after the squadron F9F-2s were grounded due to fuel contamination. (USN via Tailhook)



lines and such.

In early November, after a strike, LT John Common made a forced landing ashore at K-3, following an explosion in the nose of his aircraft after a 20mm failed to chamber. On 4 November, tragedy struck the squadron when LT George S. Brainard crashed on landing. After flying a normal approach, he landed hard, missed the wires, went through the Davis barrier and crashed into planes parked forward. Four people died, including the pilot, and three aircraft were stricken and four were damaged.

ENS R. E. Wilson was forced to ditch his F9F-2 on 4 February 1952, after an engine flameout. He ditched within the carrier's screening escorts and was immediately recovered by an



Above, VF-837 F9F-2 is positioned on the starboard catapult of the USS Antietam (CV-36) on 25 February 1952. Nose and fin tip markings in yellow have been added. (National Archives) Below, VF-837 Panthers are loaded aboard ship. (USN)





HU-1 helicopter. Another Panther was lost on takeoff when it lost aileron control and a squadron plane captain was lost over the side.

The next month, VF-837 lost

another aircraft, after being hit by AAA. The pilot made an emergency wheels-up landing at an auxiliary airfield, but the aircraft was unrepairable. It was during this time that problems with the Mk. 55 bomb racks

Above, VF-837 F9F-2 sails over the barrier on CVA-47 on 15 November 1952 and crashes into the forward pack of aircraft, below, that had previously landed during carrier qualifications. (National Archives)



Above, a repeat of the accident seen on the previous page, but this time while deployed aboard CVA-37 occurred on 25 February 1953. (USN) At right and below, VF-154 F9F-5s aboard CVA-37 with yellow nose flashes and fin tips. (USN via Kaston)

developed. Several aircraft lost bombs during catapult launches and the squadron experienced an unac-





At left, armorers load 250 and 500 pound bombs on the wing of a VF-154 F9F-5 Panther. (USN) Below, VF-154 F9F-5 Panthers move into position on the deck of the USS Princeton (CVA-37) for another strike over Korea in 1953. Aircraft number 401 has one 500-pound and two 250-pound bombs on each wing. (USN)



ceptable amount of hung ordnance.

The squadron returned to the United States on 2 May 1952 and almost all personnel were reassigned or returned to inactive duty. After a month's stand-down, the squadron, now under the command of LCDR Bruce Bell, started a seven-month turnaround training cycle.

During the Antietam deployment, with the exception of the Composite Squadron Detachments, CVG-15 was an all-reserve Air Wing and received a Presidential Unit Citation.

VF-837 transitioned to the F9F-5, but the work-up on the new version proved not to be uneventful. On 7 October 1952, LT Stanley J. Dunmore lost his life when the wings folded on his Panther during flight. The accident caused Grumman to initiate a fix. Additionally while at Moffett, all but three aircraft experienced oxygen contamination. The squadron spent four weeks of weapons training at El Centro followed by FCLPs and carrier qualifications aboard the USS Philippine Sea (VCA-47). Calamity struck again during carrier qualifications when a squadron Panther broke its hook on the ramp and crashed into the forward pack of aircraft. Then on 14



Above, VF-154 F9F-5 Panther was blown over on its side prior to a mission over Korea by the jet exhaust of another aircraft. Note bombs attached to the wings. (USN) At left, VF-154 F9F-5 in the foreground flying off the coast of Korea with ■ F9F-5 from its sister squadron VF-153. (USN) Below, VF-154 aircraft launching from the USS Princeton. (USN)

December ENS Phillip C. McKenney was killed in his F9F-5.





A second war cruise was conducted from 24 January 1953 through 21 September 1953 aboard the USS Princeton (CVA-37). On 4 February 1953, the squadron was redesignated VF-154. Initially, the Air Group was tasked with providing close air support for U. N. forces. Primary targets were Chongjin, Hungnam, Wonsan, Hamhung, Komdok, Pachunjang and Osanni. On 15 June, VF-154 flew 48 combat sorties which established a fleet record for operations in a single day. In addition, the Air Group set a Korean War record of 59 days of continuous combat operations. Starting in late June and up until the signing of the Armistice on 27 July 1953, the

squadron concentrated on attacking enemy airfields. During the final week of the war VF-154 took part in three of the largest carrier attacks of the war. Final score for the squadron was over 1.5 million rounds of ammunition and 470 tons of bombs expended on this cruise.

A post-war WESTPAC cruise aboard the USS Yorktown (CVA-10) occurred from 1 July 1954 through 28 February 1955. Operations were conducted in-and-around Taiwan and the Philippines. CDR W. A. Shryock was in command during the deployment and was promoted to CAG-15. LCDR J. H. Lobdell took over the squadron

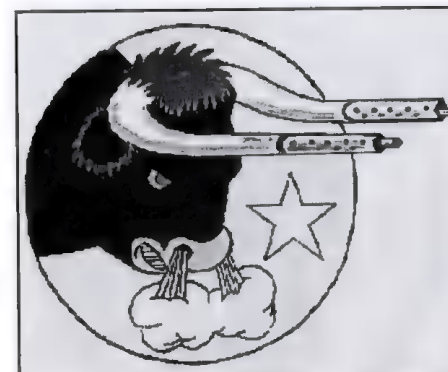
Above and below, VF-154 F9F-5s in flight with yellow noses, fin tips and lightning bolts. (USN)

for the remainder of the cruise.

VF-154 returned to NAS Moffett Field on 31 February 1955 and transferred to the FJ-3 Fury in July. In June 1957, the squadron transitioned to the F8U-1 Crusader. The F-4B replaced the Crusader in April 1966 and the squadron moved up to F-4Js and finally F-4Ns before the Phantoms were replaced by F-14A Tomcats in May 1984.



FIGHTER SQUADRON NINE SIXTEEN, VF-916 FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHTY - THREE, VF-83 "ROARING BULLS"



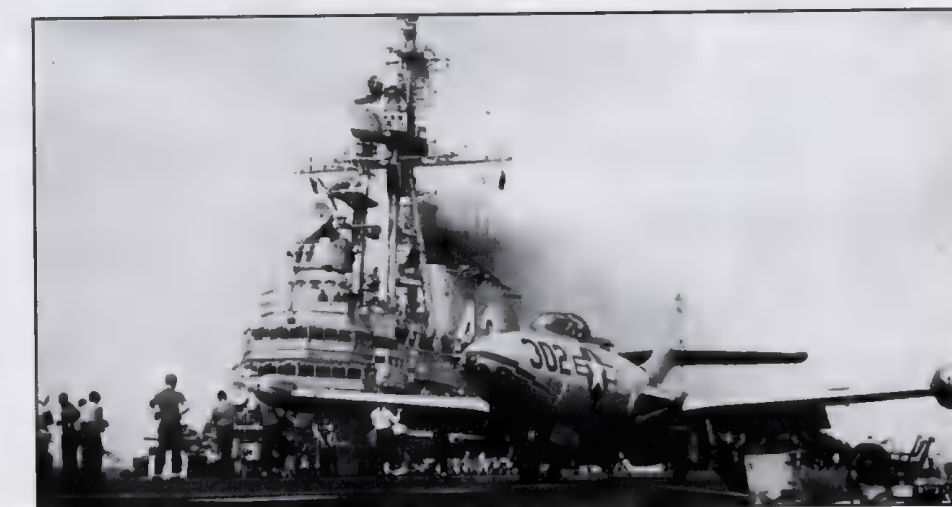
Reserve squadron VF-916 was called to active duty in response to the Korean conflict on 1 February 1951 with F4U-4 Corsairs. In December, the squadron received the Grumman F9F-2 Panther, but reverted back to props with the Grumman F8F-2 Bearcat in May 1952. In September, VF-916 returned to jets with the F9F-5 Panther. On 4 February 1953 the squadron was redesignated VF-83.

From January through March 1953, VF-916/VF-83 participated in angled deck trials on board the USS Antietam (CVA-36) off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. VF-83 deployed with its Panthers aboard the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43) from 26 April through 21 October 1953 to the Mediterranean as part of CVG-8. During the Coral Sea cruise, the squadron took part in Operations Black Wave, Kara Man, Weld Fast, and Adriatic Weld.

After returning to NAS Oceana, the squadron transitioned to the Vought F7U-3 Cutlass in August 1954. On 1 July 1955 VF-83 was redesignated VA-86 and received F7U-3Ms. In March 1957, the Douglas A4D-1 Skyhawk was received, which started a 14-year association with the "Scooter". During this time the squadron flew the A4D-1, A4D-2, A4D-2N, and A-4E. The Vought A-7E Corsair II replaced the Skyhawks on 19 June 1970 and the F/A-18C Hornet replaced the Corsairs on 25 April 1988. The squadron was redesignated VFA-83 on 1 March 1988.



Above, VF-916 pilots in January 1953. Back row left to right: ENS Roberts, LTJG Bill Eaton, LTJG Jim D'Orasy, LT Greg Fortune, LT J. Buckner, LTJG Francis O'Connor, LT Horace Benson, LT Finley, LTJG Usher, ENS Penn, and LTJG Bill Boyle. Front row left to right: LT Paul Garland, LT Roscoe Quinlan, LT Warren Wickwire, XO LCDR Linzee Wallis, CO LCDR A. J. Fecke, LT John Shultz, LT Bauder, and LT Stoke. (USN) Below, VF-83 F9F-5 311/E landing aboard the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43) in 1953. (USN) Bottom, natural metal VF-83 F9F-5 302/E is poised to launch from the Coral Sea in 1953. (USN)

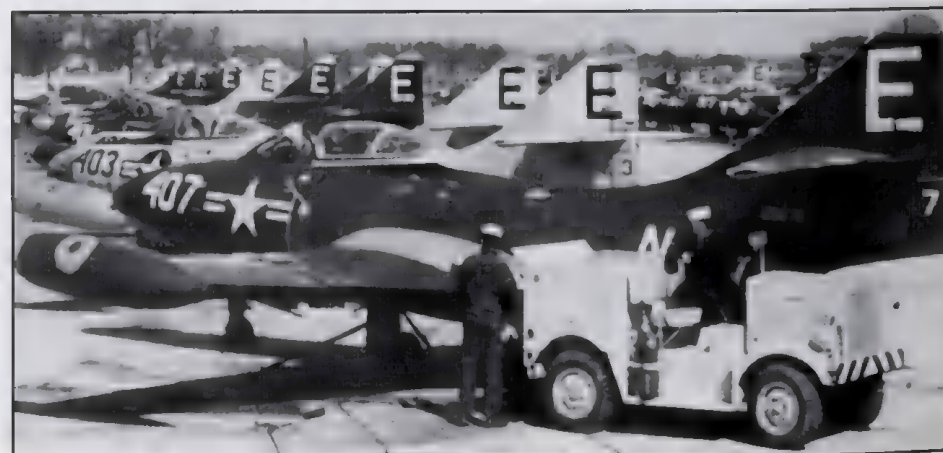
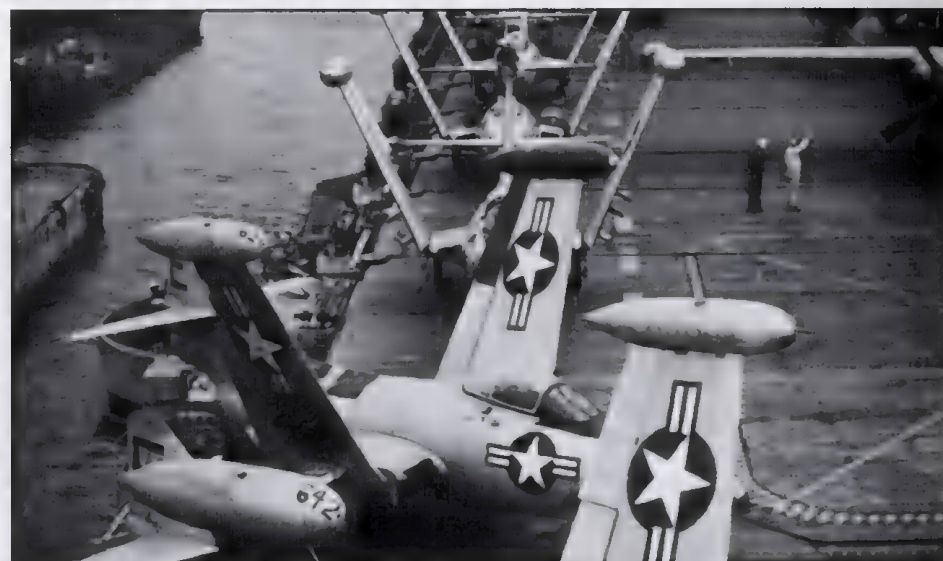


FIGHTER SQUADRON NINE TWENTY - ONE, VF-921
FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHTY - FOUR, VF-84 "SIDEWINDERS"

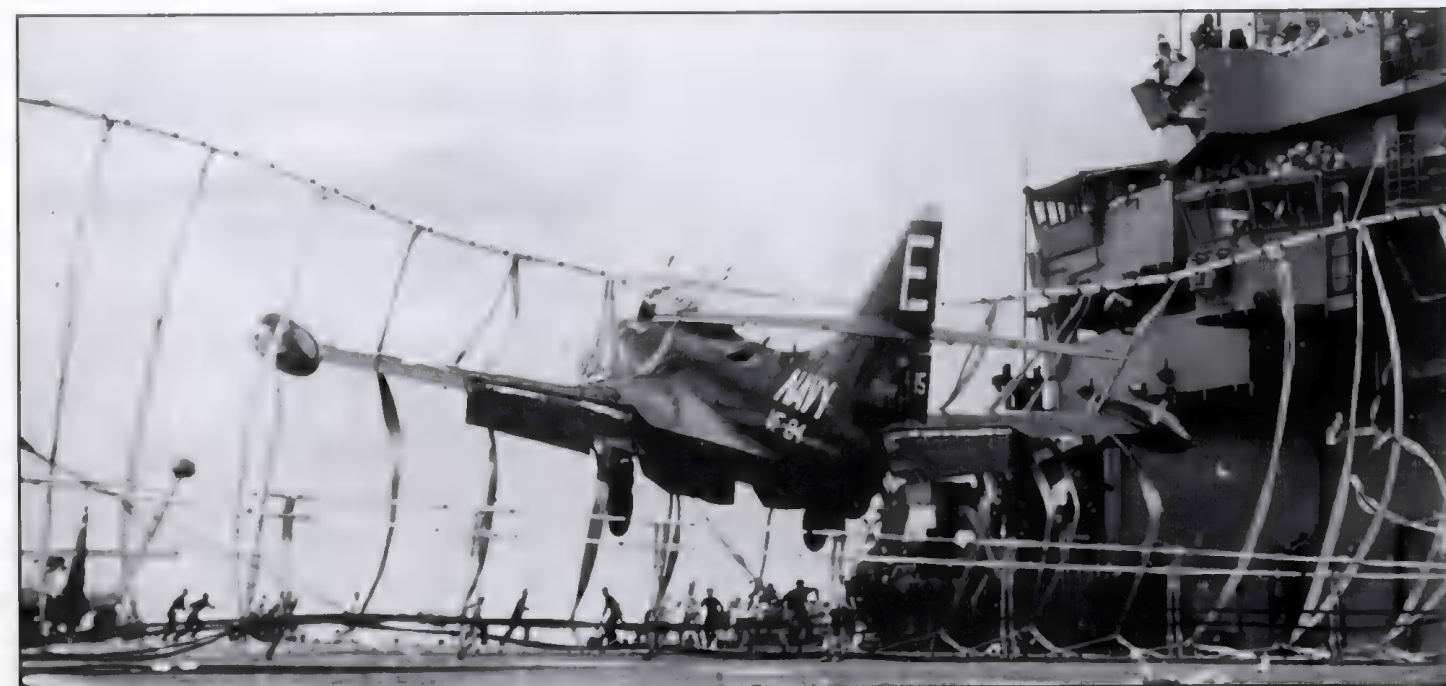


VF-84 was originally established as VF-921, a reserve squadron called to active duty from NAS Saint Louis, MO, in February 1951. They flew the F4U-4 Corsair and transitioned to the F8F-2 Bearcat in June 1952. They started transitioning to the F9F-5 Panther in September 1952 and completed the transition in November. In February 1953, VF-921 was redesignated VF-84.

The squadron took part in carrier trials in the Atlantic of the Navy's first angled-deck carrier, the USS Antietam (CVA-36). The first series of tests were conducted off of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, from 26 February through 8 March 1953. On 27 April, the squadron reported back aboard for "heavy weather" trials. These only lasted a week, but the squadron was brought back aboard



At top, VF-84 F9F-5 on the deck of the USS Bennington (CVA-20) in August 1953 during an open house for the citizens of Nova Scotia. The Panther shares the flight deck with two Skyraiders and a SkyKnight. (USN) Above right, natural metal VF-84 F9F-5s share the flight deck on the Bennington with the Navy's heavy-weight the North American AJ Savage during a Midshipman cruise in August 1953. The aircraft fin tips were yellow. (USN) At right, a mix of blue and natural metal F9F-5s are prepped for a training mission at NAS Jacksonville in 1954. (USN)



Barrier crash sequence of VF-84 F9F-5 125232 aboard the USS Lake Champlain (CVA-39). Fin tip, tip tank, and nose markings were yellow. The pilot's left arm was raised above the canopy just prior to engaging the barrier. (USN)





for a VIP cruise on 19 May. the squadron returned in late May only to report back aboard from 11 June through 21 July 1953. During this cruise the squadron was to demonstrate to the British the benefits of the angled deck and allow them to participate in flight operations. During their time on Antietam, the squadron made approximately 900 touch-and-goes and 800 arrested landings.

In August they boarded the USS Bennington (CVA-20) for a

Midshipmen cruise to Nova Scotia. This was followed by a MED deployment aboard the USS Lake Champlain (CVA-39) from 28 September 1954 through 22 April 1955 as part of CVG-8.

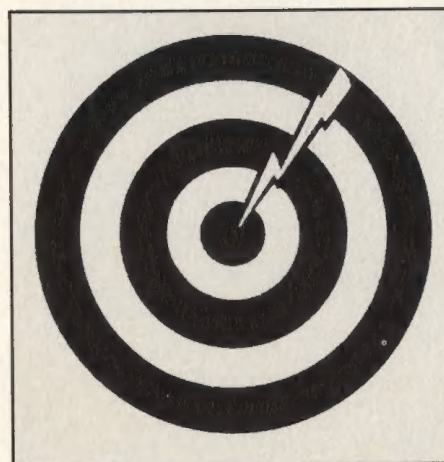
After returning from the MED cruise, the squadron was redesignated VA-86 on 1 July 1955 and received the F7U-3M Cutlass. These were replaced with A4D-1/2 Skyhawks in 1957 and the A-4C Skyhawk in 1962. A-4Es arrived on

Below, colorful yellow-trimmed VF-84 F9F-5 in flight. Note unusual yellow upper horizontal tail stripes. (via Craig Kaston) Bottom, four VF-84 F9F-5s fly past home plate, the "Champ" (CVA-39) in 1954. (USN)

28 April 1964, followed by the A-7A in February 1967. The A-7 Corsair IIs were replaced by F/A-18C Hornets in November 1987 and the squadron became VFA-86.



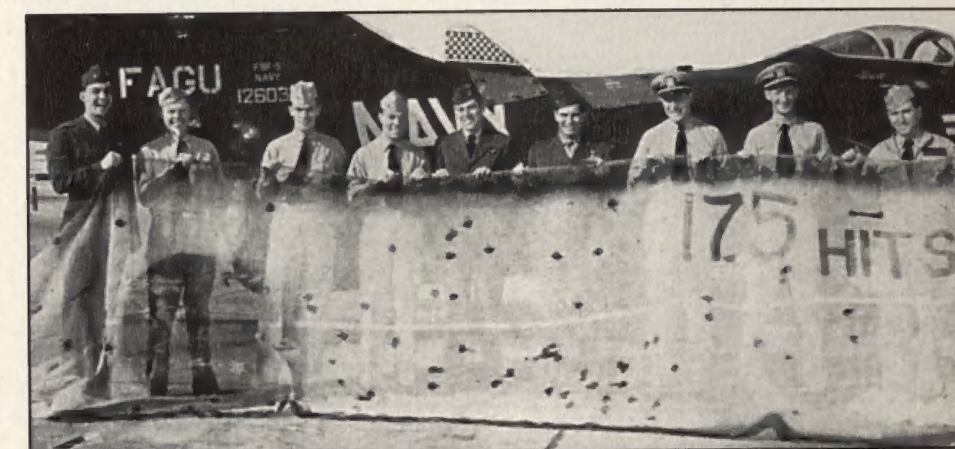
FAGU, FLEET AIR GUNNERY UNIT, EL CENTRO, CALIFORNIA



The Fleet Air Gunnery Unit (FAGU) was established at NAF El Centro, CA, in the summer of 1952. FAGU utilized the F9F-5 Panther as the gunnery training aircraft for jet fighter and attack pilots.

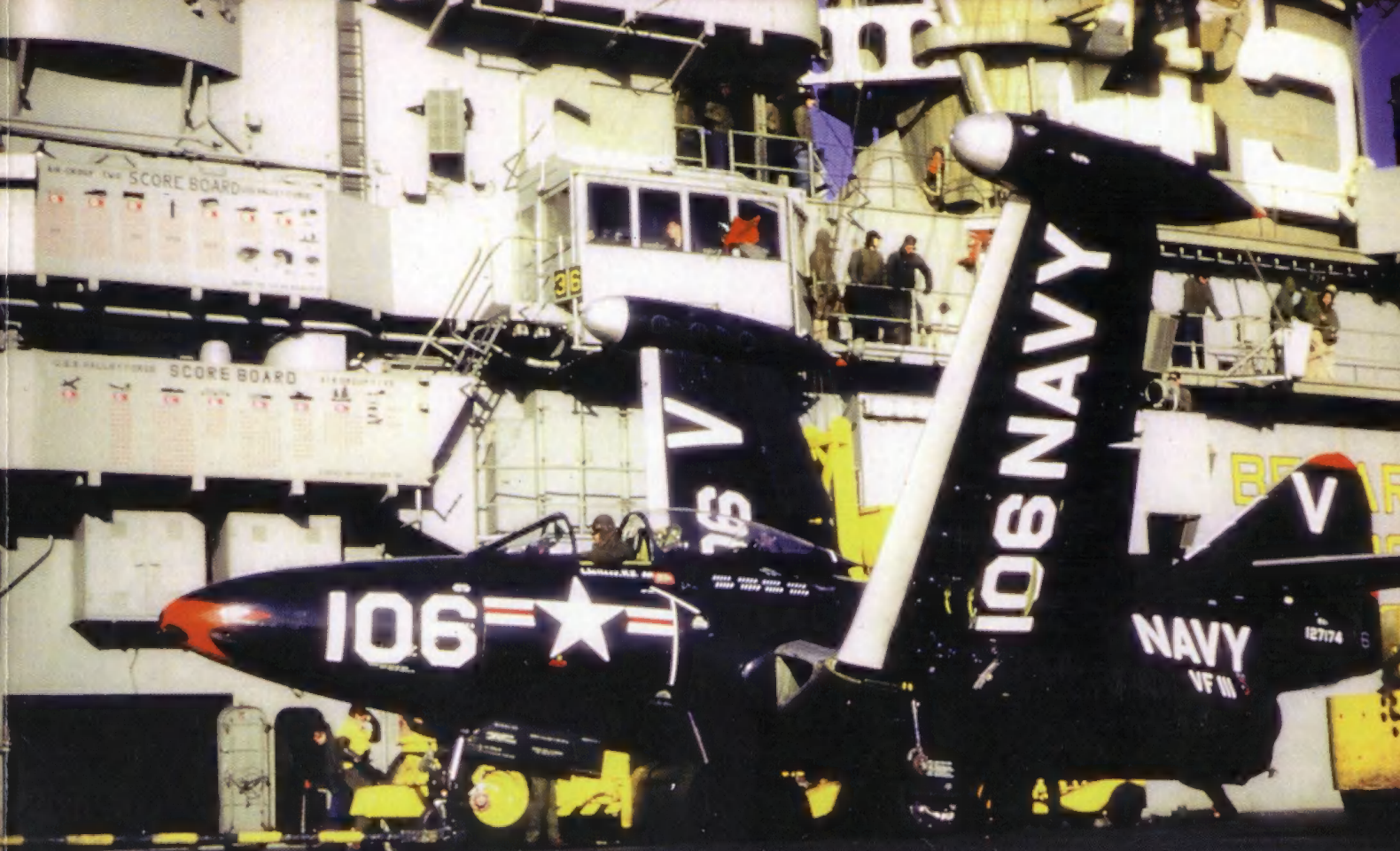
The unit's mission was to train experienced pilots in standardized methods and advanced techniques in air gunnery, bombing and rocketry. These pilots would return to their units and pass on their knowledge to the other pilots. A typical class consisted of five pilots and lasted four weeks. The course consisted of 175 hours of ground school and 45 hours of gunnery and rocketry work. Pilots practiced gunnery and rocket fire at ground targets, air-to-air gunnery, field carrier landings, night flying, ground control intercept missions and air support hops.

At top and above, students display gunnery banners with high scores. At top, 86 hits from 87 rounds fired. (USN) At right and below, FAGU flightline at El Centro, CA; tail markings were white. (via Tailhook Association)









BY STEVE GINTER